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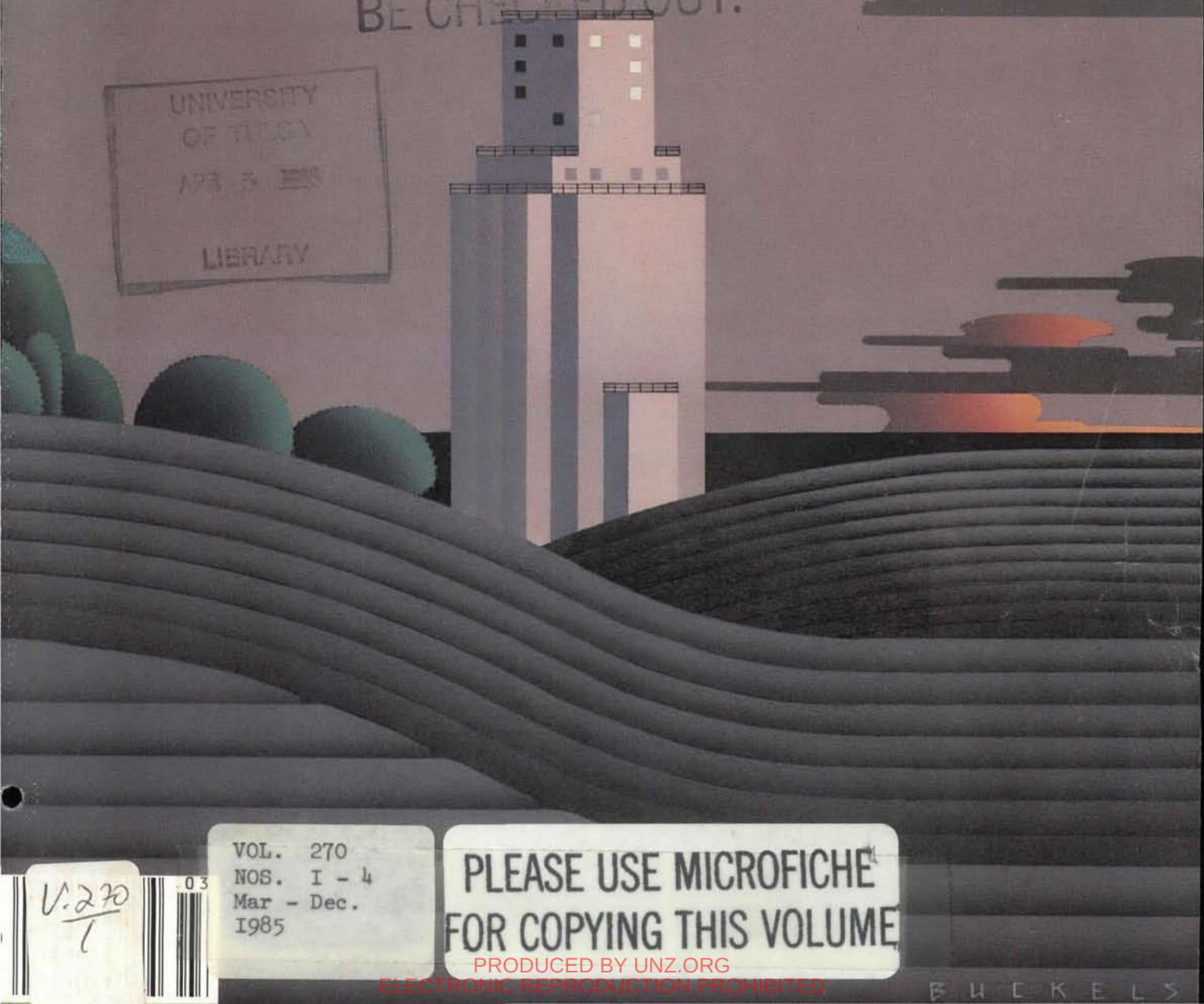

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'FUNNY, BEAUTIFUL, AND IMPORTANT' – CAROL BERGE

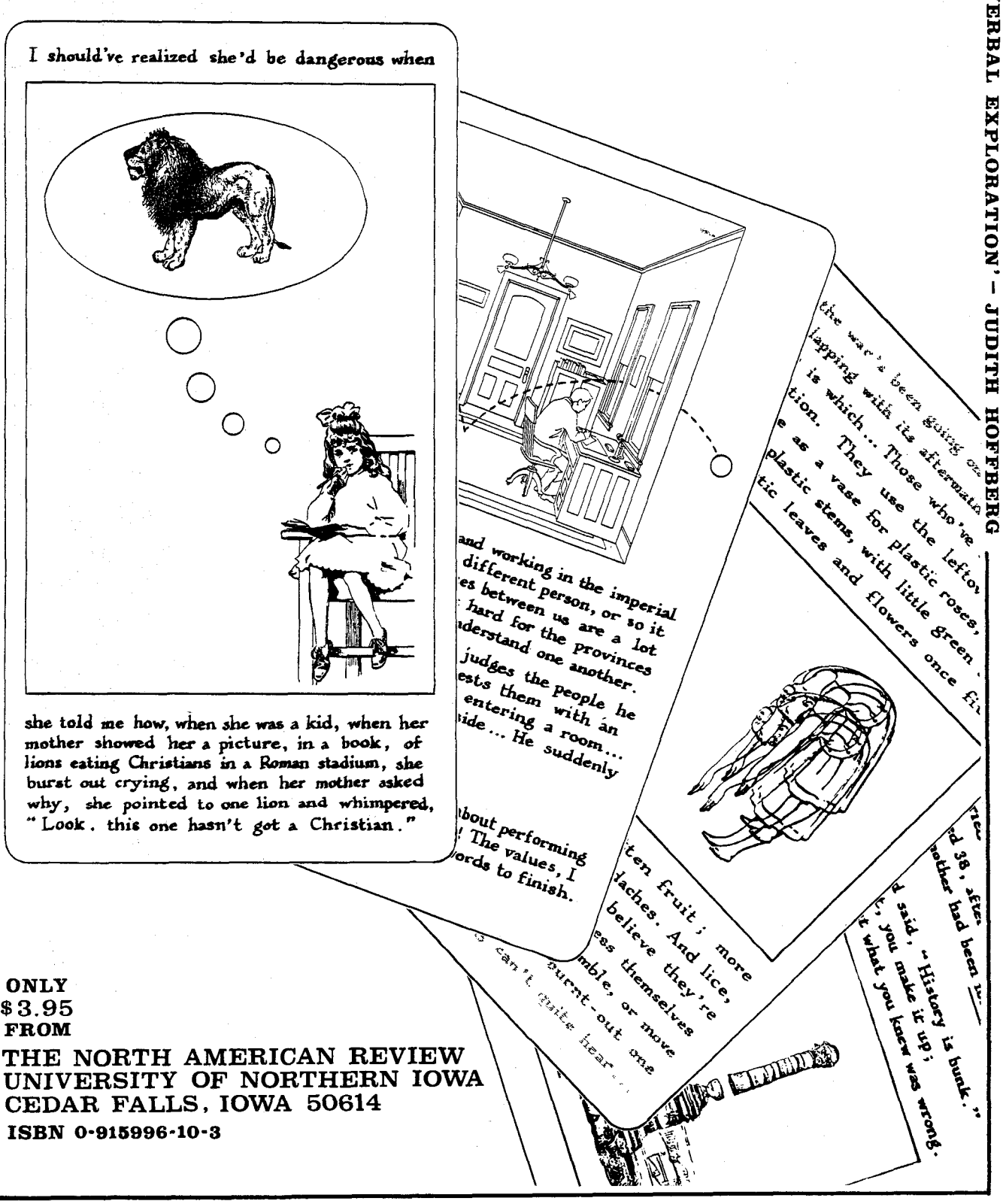
'A KASPER A DAY KEEPS THE MOODLES AWAY' – CHRISTOPHER MIDDLETON

'A JOYFUL VISUAL-VERBAL EXPLORATION' – JUDITH HOFFBERG

Illustrated Short Prose
An engaging and engaged
picture book
of anecdotes, essays & parodies

ALL COTTON BRIEFS

BY M. KASPER


I should've realized she'd be dangerous when
she told me how, when she was a kid, when her mother showed her a picture, in a book, of lions eating Christians in a Roman stadium, she burst out crying, and when her mother asked why, she pointed to one lion and whimpered, "Look. this one hasn't got a Christian."

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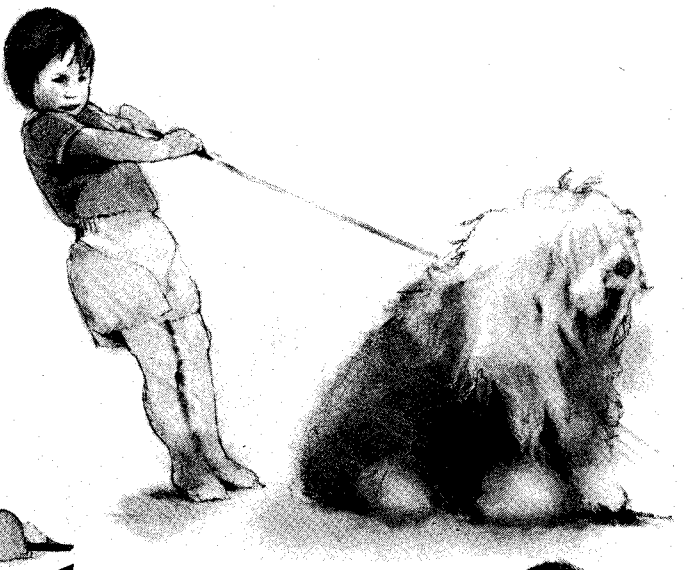

Do you know any of these people?

If so, then you understand the need to preserve our natural resources for future generations. For your own children and for theirs. They will need the same things we do—clean air and water and a healthy place to live. We can provide them for our children only if we're smart enough now not to spoil what we have. Remember the future. Your kids may need it someday.

SIERRA CLUB
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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

We imagine ourselves, after all these years, to be a literary institution, arrived at an age that implies wisdom, but wearing that age lightly (sometimes frivolously) because we are of a modern incarnation. Certainly we are a long way from the Boston of our youth, the New York City of our middle age, yet if we mark our 170th birthday without a "special" issue, it is only because we don't *feel* old; the ink still flows freely through our unhardened arteries and our talk, we trust, reaches our audience in the clearest of voices. We scarcely miss the big cities of our past—there is always plenty to be said in praise of the bucolic, the rural and misunderstood Midwest where the food comes from and where the air is pure and the rain still alkaline—and we look forward with downright eagerness to future anniversaries. In a world where America's children genuinely believe they will be obliterated by a nuclear war, we take this occasion to insist: *the planet will not blow up*. Believe it. Too many stories remain to be told, too many poems to be sung, too many words of common sense to unmuscle the men made lunatic by politics.

That said, we hasten to point out that this number of the NAR is perhaps special by being "typical." Here are the extraordinary fiction writers we have been so fortunate with in recent years—the stories here as various as the city-horror of Jeanne Wilmot's "Dirt Angel," as charming-innocent as Karen Snow's "Ghindi" or Gary Gildner's "Boats Coming Ashore," as comic as Annette Sanford's "Happy Fortieth, Ed and Shirley." Here is the hard look at the problems of the environment, from an angle (Neil Evernden's) as original as any we have presented in the past. Here are communications from Central America, from the Black Hills, from rural Indiana, from the desert Southwest. Here are delightful poems, drawings, reviews and fancies. One-hundred-seventy years old? Ask yourselves, Constant Readers: Who in the world has given you more pleasure, for more time, for so modest a price?

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THE NORTH AMERICAN

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A Black Hills Encounter

CONGER BEASLEY, JR.

> "Hurra for the prairies and the swift antelope. They fleet by the hunter like flashes or meteors."
> *John-James Audubon*

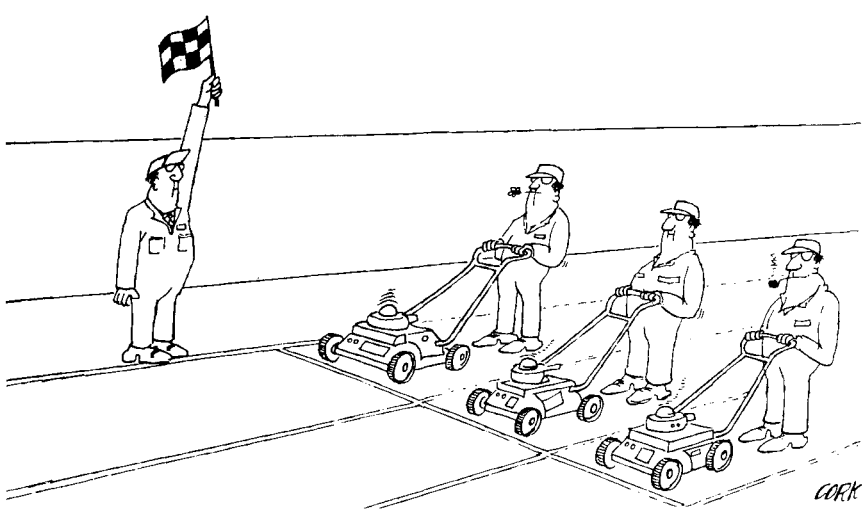
I'd been tramping up and down the hills, watching carefully for buffalo. It was late spring, too early for the rutting season, though a few calves had recently been born and it wasn't a good idea to get too near the cows. A hiker who steps between a calf and its mother runs the risk of being trampled. The bulls were off grazing by themselves, solitary dots observable far out on the rounded hills. As I walked I kept close to the trees. Buffalo are unpredictable, and if one charges the safest place to be is up in a tree. As high up as you can get, with, preferably, a comfortable branch to sit on. The buffalo might not leave for a while; he might even decide to spend the rest of the day cropping the grass at the base of the tree. A man I know who was once caught out in the open by a small band of buffalo wisely sat down and made himself as inconspicuous as possible. He crossed his legs yoga-style, bowed his head, and began to pray. Buffalo stirred all around him; one or two even touched him in the back with their noses, but he wasn't harmed. He remained in that position for three hours until the band finally disappeared over a hill.

The afternoon was gloomy. Dark rainclouds muscled down over the lower slopes of the Black Hills. I was trying to locate the creek where the summer before I'd stumbled upon a rack of bleached buffalo bones. The sun had been hot that day, the grass dry and parched. It was the rutting season, and when the wind was right I could hear bulls roaring all over the park. I came across several wallows—patches of bare earth sticky with piss and excrement in which buffalo roll to rid themselves of pesky flies. The stench from these mires was blinding. Squatting beside one, I felt as if I was looking into a hole that disappeared deep into the earth to a place that no longer existed, not even in the mind of the oldest living human. A tunnel drilling deep through human memory to a time when such sights out here on the Great Plains had been commonplace. Thousands of buffalo, clouds of migrating birds, swaying spring grasses tipped with bright flowers . . . a time when boundaries between places were marked by topographical features rather than invisible lines traced with geometric exactness from one arbitrary point to another.

But the time now was early June, and the grass shagging the hillsides of Wind Cave National Park was bright green and the buffalo were scattered far back into the trees. Down in the woody draws vines and bushes grew in thick profusion. Birds flittered incessantly, fashioning nests, declaiming their eagerness to mate. The long harsh winter had ended and everything was in motion, eager to foliate according to genetic prescription. Summer in South Dakota is short and leaves little margin for indolent dawdling. Birds and animals know this and go about their business with an urgency of purpose far different from their southerly counterparts.

I crossed the road that threads the eastern rim of the park and stepped carefully through a prairie-dog village. My presence was greeted with a flurry of squeaks and chirps, each watchdog at the hole passing on the signal to the next before disappearing from view. So voracious are these animals, the terrain was shorn of grass. Ranchers detest them, and more than one politician in South Dakota has been elected to office on an anti-prairie dog platform. Their natural predators include badgers, coyotes, hawks, and black-footed ferrets. Extensive poisoning of prairie dogs has resulted, paradoxically, in the virtual elimination of the black-footed ferret. This is unfortunate, as a few ferrets are capable of controlling the population of a prairie-dog village. The prairie dogs seem to know this, and they allow the ferrets to cohabit with them, even occupy the same holes. Many ranchers, however, don't want prairie dogs anywhere on their land. They regard them as the worst sort of pest, whose sole purpose is to devour the forage that properly belongs to cattle. A few ranchers have proposed a radical solution—the elimination of the prairie dog. Thus is illustrated one of the cardinal differences between animals and men; while ferrets can reduce the numbers of prairie dogs to acceptable levels, only man can exterminate them all.

I started up the hill away from the prairie dog village. The nearest tree was several hundred yards away. I walked softly, my boots crunching



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the new grass. My plan was to ease up to the crown of the hill and peer over the rim. My fear—a stomach-gurgling pang—was that just over the rim a buffalo might be grazing. And then I'd have to make an important decision. Then, with my heart clacking in my throat, I'd have to ease back down the hill, diagonally toward the trees on my left. Or beat a hasty retreat straight through the prairie dog village to the road. Or, after praying fervently, be transported to the other side of the hill by a mysterious windspout.

(Provided I saw the buffalo first and it chose to ignore me, the first two contingencies were possible. Should the beast take offense at my presence, the third was my only hope. Few men have ever outrun a buffalo on foot.)

Just then a head appeared over the rim. I gulped and squatted down, gripping my walking stick. Silhouetted against the gray sky, its features obscured in shadow, the animal had a narrow skull and a set of distinctive horns. It wasn't a buffalo, thank fortune, but an antelope. With a graceful, stately gait it ambled over the top of the hill. The black antlers poking out from the sleek skull were pronged at the tips like darning needles. The animal moved with a casual grace that belied its extraordinary power. Its underbelly, lower legs, and throat were white; its back and tubular body a creamy buff color. After the horns, the legs were the most remarkable feature—long and shapely and feminine, with muscular thighs jointed high up on the solid body. The legs tapered delicately to dark hooves; compared with the meaty thighs the ankles were disproportionately slim. The fastest animal on the North American continent, it is capable of speeds over 40 m.p.h. A large chest cavity and outsized heart enable blood to circulate rapidly through its system. The King of Speed. A shy, elusive grazer built like a projectile, with a placid disposition and a hankering for empty spaces. Adorning its handsome rump was a cowl of bristly white hair. When the animal is alarmed, the hair flashes and expands, signaling other antelope of danger.

Slowly the antelope came down the hill. Twenty feet away it stopped, looked slowly around, looked straight at me. The expression in its liquid brown eyes rattled my body all the way to my toes. It looked at me plainly, without artifice or design, with forthright curiosity. A breeze whirled over the hill and flowed past us, rippling my shirt. The prairie dogs I'd passed earlier didn't regard me this way, and neither had the buffalo—their gaze was sullenly indifferent; the prairie dogs had jumped all over me with their bright, panicky eyes. The antelope's gaze was different—measured, temperate, steady, unhurried; the gaze of a self-contained woman: remote yet appealing, elusive yet irresistible.

Reaching out, first with one dainty forehoof then the other, the antelope scraped at the grass. Then, squatting delicately, it pissed a frothy stream, regarding me curiously all the while. The stream gushed steadily, a murky-colored liquid that splattered the shortgrass prairie.

Did this ever happen to Thoreau or John Muir? I wondered. When an animal pissed in front of a man was it a salutation indicating friendly feelings? Perhaps my own sweaty scent had relaxed the creature's loins; or perhaps this was the way the pronghorn signaled its acceptance of me, its non-fear.

Finished pissing, it squatted anew and proceeded to defecate onto the damp spot, globular turds tumbling from its puckered anus. *Well goddamn*, I muttered. *What next?* I half-expected it to approach and nuzzle my cheek. If this ever did happen to Thoreau or Muir or Audubon or John Burroughs, they never wrote about it. What was going on? Was there a message in this? Was the animal showing me its contempt, or was I ascribing an all-too-human connotation to the act? Did it feel so at ease in my presence that, like an old lover, it felt it could behave in an intimate fashion?

But then, we weren't in a boudoir; we were somewhere in the Great Outdoors. If the animal chose to perform its duties a few feet from my eyes, perhaps I should take it as a compliment. Perhaps it was sharing something with me. Perhaps, because of the uniqueness of the moment, it felt compelled to mark the spot, to commemorate the encounter. I would never know for sure. We could examine one another silently—that was the extent of our communication. I could infer certain motivations from its behavior, and it could do likewise with mine. Perhaps, I thought, the proper response was to piss back. But my bladder was as dry as a bean bag. Instead, I gave the pronghorn a deep bow . . . slow and courtly as I could make it . . . as a gentleman might to a lady at the outset of a ballroom dance.

A century ago the pronghorn would have bolted at my scent. In the early 1800s there were 30 to 40 million pronghorn antelope on the North American continent. Today there are 400,000. We have become so inured to the spectacle of mass death that we cannot begin to fathom the indescribable slaughter of animals that took place on this continent during the 19th century. Buffalo, as many as 60 million. Pronghorn antelope, 30-plus million. Grizzly bears, several hundred thousand. Passenger pigeons, a few billion. The list of eradicated species forms a melancholy roll: Great Auk, Carolina Parakeet, Sea Mink, Spectacled Cormorant, Steller's Sea Cow, Labrador Duck, Audubon Big Horn Sheep, Passenger Pigeon, Heath Hen, Ivory-Billed Woodpecker. Nothing less than an all-out assault against wildlife. An attempt, in the name of progress and expansion, to transform the American wilderness into an orderly and fruitful garden, a "peaceable kingdom" of domesticity and animal husbandry.

Some kind of baleful precedent was established during the 1800s, which can be linked to the ghastly slaughter of human beings in the 20th century. That may sound far-fetched, but if human beings can extirpate an entire species of animal, what's to prevent them from killing, say, an entire race of people? The Nazis tried it during World War II and nearly succeeded; more recently, in Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge has massacred a quarter of its population in the name of a half-baked Marxist ideology.

What happens to people when they realize they can eradicate an entire species with impunity? The quantification of death becomes an all-absorbing spectacle; a curious kind of numbers game develops which can only be resolved when the desired number has been reached. Devising an efficient system to kill other creatures becomes a kind of intellectual problem that can only be computed through technique. A system of mass death has to be devised by which the executors can process victims in statistical quantities. Such an undertaking not only requires considerable organizational effort but the

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tacit collusion of all the population, not just those who pull the triggers. Trapping or netting passenger pigeons in the 19th century was an effective way to kill them, but even more effective was to point up the barrel of the old cannon that stood on the village green and fire a load of scrap iron and nails into a dense flock passing overhead. Two or three blasts, and the sky literally rained dead pigeons. A system for killing Great Auks took advantage of their herd mentality. Landing on lonely North Atlantic islands where the birds nested every spring, hunters propped up long planks from the shore out to their rowboats. Once they got the flightless birds to follow one another up the planks, one man armed with a club could bash in thousands of skulls. Buffalo hunting, once considered a dangerous pursuit on horseback when the hunter was armed with a bow and arrow, became by the 1860s and '70s little more than an exercise in target practice for men equipped with long-range rifles.

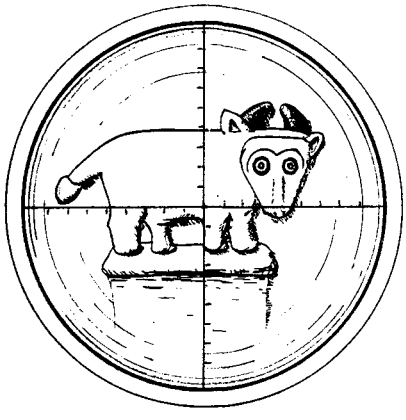
If one has become conditioned to think apocalyptically, how great a leap is it, then, from wiping out a species of animal to killing every member of a certain human kind? Once humanity becomes conditioned to expunging individual species, it becomes easier to rationalize the liquidation of creatures located elsewhere along the evolutionary ladder. Especially when, in the case of the buffalo and the passenger pigeon, there seem to be so many of them. Genocide is the most monstrous crime that can be perpetrated against the earth. There is no barbarity more incomprehensible—more antithetical to the spirit of life—than the deliberate destruction of an entire kind of creature or plant. What sort of people would carry out such a crime? What sort of people would kill creatures, not to eat them or salvage their pelts, but simply *to watch them die*? Such activity is about as debased as human beings can sink to. It is the ultimate blasphemy, an implacable refutation of the natural will to live and multiply, a crime that not even Satan at his most vicious or turgid could have devised.

Slowly the pronghorn circled downwind and crept steadily closer. I wasn't afraid—I was wary and wondered if it ever attacked humans—but I wasn't afraid. I was curious to touch it, detect its smell, experience it up close with my skin. Obviously, the animal knew I wouldn't shoot it, that the stick in my hand wasn't a rifle. Early travelers reported that antelope was sweet to eat. I wouldn't have the pleasure, though I might have something else . . . an encounter; a confrontation; a face-off with a wild creature that was as different from me as I could possibly imagine. In the animal's elegant form there was something decidedly sexual; I yearned to run my hand along its rump and flanks. It regarded me frankly yet shyly, boldly yet full of hesitation. Suddenly, I was seized by the old aboriginal urge to merge with its form. (Indian runners in Northern California, encountering a grizzly bear on a lonely mountain path, liked to run headlong into the creature, hoping to pass through, transformed in power and radiance, on the other side.) Suddenly, I felt an ecstatic urge to *become* it . . . to sprout horns, to see long distances, to run 40 m.p.h. . . . to evolve into something both animal and human, a hybrid creature, vibrant and alive, sacred and trembling.

But no . . . Impossible. My distinctness was complete, the distance between us inviolable. In order to reverence the animal, I would have to kill it and eat it and wear its skin around my body and retain some piece—a bone or feature—as a talisman. And I was 150 years too late for that. I could only look at it, approach cautiously, exchange stares; it was not my fate to smell its blood or taste its sweet flesh. Like so many other activities of the 20th century, I was reduced to the role of spectator, a watcher with hot, yearning eyes. And while I was delighted that it was protected by law and could not be slaughtered wholesale, I regretted that I could not stalk it as part of a complex ritual. What is the difference then, you might ask? When does ritual slaying degenerate into wanton killing? When the animal is regarded as an integer rather than a coeval mystery; when the communion between the two of you is no longer propitiatory, and the sound of the gun barking in your hands becomes the coveted sensation.

At last, its curiosity sated, the antelope passed on down the hill, pausing occasionally to chew grass. Raindrops peppered my bare scalp. Behind me, on the flat stretch of bare ground, prairie dogs began squeaking with alarm. I heard a car turn up the road toward the campground. □

Over on King St., you'll notice, there's the Kollmorgen factory. They make periscopes for Trident submarines, and sights for XM-1 tanks. Peep-holes for the Pentagon, we call 'em.



The company president defends himself. "We're not in the business that produces products that kill people," he says. "We design devices which are used principally to protect people from the environment, so they can look out, and gather information, and see where they're going, and..."

The more he talks, the clearer it is that he just doesn't see how he's fooling himself, if not us, all of us, adrift in this sea of long-winded rationalizing.

"...so they can navigate," he continues, "in the hostile environment of an ocean, or for people under armament to view the outside world without fear of getting hit by anything."

M. KASPER

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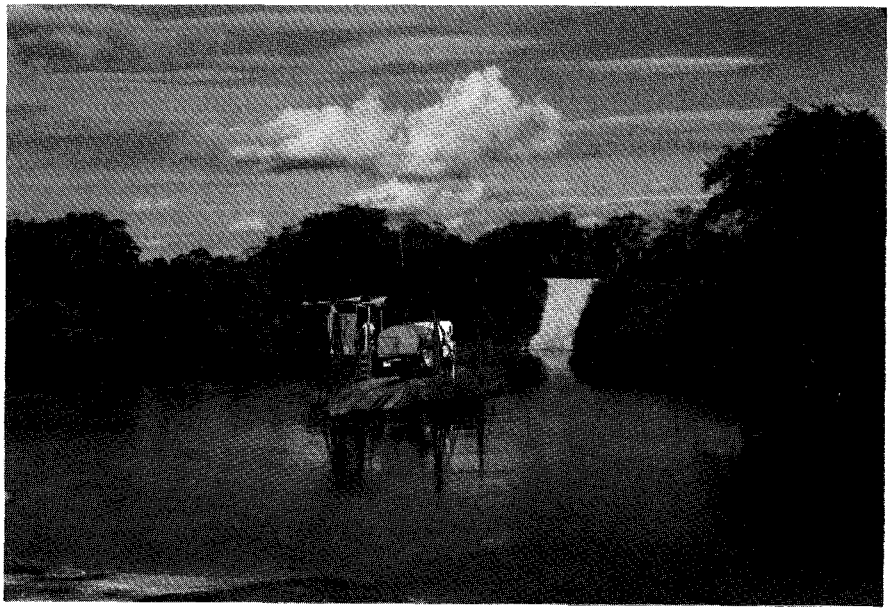
Crocodiles in Belize: Survival Tactics

HOLLY T. HOPE



Visitors come to Belize for a variety of reasons: archaeologists dig for Mayan artifacts; linguists study obscure Creole and Carib dialects; biologists survey, classify, and experiment with exotic flora and fauna; naturalists work to preserve habitats and prevent excessive hunting; supernaturalists hunt for souls to save; fortune seekers look for the good life; drifters search for the easy life; movie moguls ferret out potential studio sites; novelists collect local color for scenes in offbeat, tropical settings. Bounded on the north by Mexico, on the south and west by Guatemala, and on the east by the Caribbean, Belize is accessible by car, boat, or plane from the United States. As a former British colony (British Honduras), it is English-speaking. Its barrier reef—the second longest in the world—is the main tourist attraction. On the mainland, roads are few and, during the rainy season, often impassable; accommodations are sparse and not cheap. A visitor to Belize must, by definition, be something of an adventurer.

C. L. "Ab" Abercrombie III wasn't looking for anything in particular when he first came to Belize over Christmas in 1975. He hadn't been outside the United States since returning from Vietnam in the '60s, and a vacation in the tropics seemed a good way to spend the time between terms at Wofford College in Spartanburg, South Carolina, where he taught history and government. He didn't expect to see any crocodiles. A herpetologist by avocation, Ab had read a report by crocodilian specialist James Powell which claimed that crocodiles in Belize had been virtually extirpated.

Then Ab saw a road-killed crocodile near Stann Creek Town (now Dangriga) in southern Belize. After measuring it, he identified it as a Morelet's crocodile (*Crocodylus moreletii*), declared an endangered species by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN). Ab perked up right away. He knew that the Atlanta zoo bred Morelet's crocodiles. When he returned home he talked to the personnel at the zoo about establishing a restocking program in Central America. In the summer of 1978 Ab returned to Belize, having secured a faculty development grant from Wofford to survey the crocodile population.

Morelet's is a species about which little is known. The first description appeared in 1851, by Auguste Duméril and André M.C. Duméril, based on an expedition by P.M.A. Morelet to Mexico and Central America. Then for seventy years the species was "lost"; some biologists merged it with the Cuban crocodile (*C. rhombifer*). In 1923 Karl P. Schmidt "rediscovered" them in abundance near a causeway in Belize. Subsequent expeditions in the '50s and '60s, including Powell's, found them to be far less plentiful, if not extinct.

Powell's failure to sight any crocodiles on his trip was a result of the way he went about looking for them: exclusively in the daytime, exclusively from roads accessible to his Karman Ghia. Initially Ab hoped that he, too, would be able to confine his investigations to rivers and creeks near the major towns of Belize. When that yielded negative results, though, he changed his tactics. Talking to hunters he found that crocodiles were located mostly in remote inland lagoons—places not easily reached. Borrowing or renting four-wheel drive vehicles and canoes, he managed: driving over washboard roads, down mudpaths and through creeks; paddling canoes in the dark over lily pads and rocks, through reeds, mangrove tunnels, and rapids. He sighted sixty crocodiles on the '78 trip and informants told him there were others. Considerably more hopeful than the conclusions of Powell's expedition, the results pleased Ab. Still, the size and age distribution of the population concerned him. At most, only six of the observed crocodiles were breeding-size adults; only one of the sixty was a hatchling. In 1980 Ab published an article in *Biological Conservation* making two recommendations: (1) to abandon the plan to restock Belize with juvenile Morelet's, as juveniles were in no short supply; (2) to declare a five-to-ten-year moratorium on all crocodile hunting, to be followed by a carefully monitored harvesting program. In

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1980 Belize passed a law prohibiting all hunting of crocodiles.

Subsequent trips to Belize in 1979, 1980, and 1982 were plagued by technical difficulties—flat tires, broken accelerator cables, empty gas tanks—and minor human discomforts: bites (insect, snake, and crocodile), sunburns, and digestive disruptions. By the time of the 1984 excursion, however, funded in large part by the New York Zoological Society, Ab had worked out the essential provisions: his white Dodge pickup, two aluminum canoes, five spare tires, paddles and nooses, dry boxes, WHEAT lights, binoculars, a compass and machete, maps, two tents, sleeping bags, a foam rubber pad, rain ponchos and poncho liners, Army insect repellent and sunburn lotion, iodine, matches, and a few cooking implements.

Friends and former students who accompany Ab on these adventures are labeled "boonierats"—people who can get along without. "I shan't tell you what to take," he wrote in his nineteen-page agenda for the '84 trip entitled "Warning Orders for Tropical Operations," "but in general, if you think you need it, don't bring it. If you know you need it, consider not bringing it." He did recommend taking a thick, slow-reading book, and maybe a toothbrush and change of underwear. And malaria pills. Altogether there were seven of us, three of whom went back the day after I arrived in late May. Clint Jeske, a graduate student in wildlife ecology at the University of Florida, and Ab stayed on; Cathy Puckett, also a graduate student at Florida, joined us the day after I arrived. Both Clint and Cathy had caught alligators in Florida. Cathy had also been on a month-long crocodile study in Venezuela. Having seen crocodiles only through bars or a television screen, I came along out of curiosity—for some of the same reasons Ab first came to Belize: to see a new country, to get a break from teaching, to forsake creature comforts for the creatures themselves.

We stop first in Bermudian Landing, a short drive from Belize City and a ride across the Belize River on a wooden ferry, hand-cranked along a cable by one, then two, and finally three men as the force of the current increases. At the top of the river bank a sign welcomes us to the village. We look around at the tiny thatched huts for a store where we can buy cold drinks and ask a few questions. A rotund man with a brown face and thinning hair ambles across the dirt road in front of us and motions us to follow him. He unlocks the door of a small building on the left and opens a window in front. We select our drinks and then ask if anyone there hunts alligators (the local name for crocodiles).

"Alligators?" He frowns and hesitates a moment, then calls across the road to a group of men watching us. A tall, thin, brown man crosses over eagerly. "These people want to know about alligators."

The tall man nods several times and smiles broadly, revealing toothless gums. He speaks enthusiastically and unintelligibly. We bob our heads along with his, then turn back to the storekeeper for a translation. He dismisses the other man and raises his eyebrows slightly, stretching the loose skin around his eyes. "Alligators . . . they used to hunt them." He leans towards us in a conspiratorial fashion, as if to confide a secret, then draws back and shrugs. "Now they are protected. There's a law, you see."

Other officials—the school principal, the village chairman—repeat the same answer more or less. In Bermudian Landing they are accustomed to questions from strangers. The Audubon Society has often brought visitors here to see and hear the howler monkeys, clumped like termite nests in the trees along the river. "Research? Audubon?" the village officials each ask us in turn, and then they tell us what they think we want to hear.

What they don't say is that the law is virtually unenforceable. With the exception of the coasts, dense forests cover much of Belize, timber having been its first and, for several centuries, only industry. For every clump of trees there appears to be a body of water: a puddle, a pond, a swamp, a creek, a river. And in every body of water there may be a crocodile. (Flying over Belize I wondered how the people manage to stay dry in this land where the rainfall can be measured in feet rather than inches, much less how anyone could patrol it. Landing at the airport near Belize City, I was alarmed by what looked like smoke pouring out the vents above the seats. It was only vapor. It came as no surprise that one likely derivation for the name "Belize" is a Mayan word meaning "muddy water.") The combination of an abundance of water and trees and a scarcity of roads has probably protected the crocodiles from extinction; but an experienced hunter can overcome these obstructions more easily than a law enforcement official. If laws alone were sufficient to halt crocodile hunting in Belize, an older prohibition against night-hunting would have sufficed. A law prohibiting the export of hides might prove more effective; but Chetumal, a major Mexican port of trade, legal and otherwise, is right across the border.

Money is the real reason no one is hunting crocodiles in Belize, suggests a passing refugee from the rain this evening in Bermudian Landing. We stand on the porch of a bare, one-room, concrete block house the storekeeper has lent us for the night. (His wife is dead, his family grown or gone, he told us. There is no place to sit, but we can stay there. If anyone bothers us, tell them it is okay. It is his house. It was not clear where he lived.) We listen in the dark to the rain and the voice of the friendly passerby. He speaks of the assistance granted to victims of hurricane Greta who supported the People's United Party (PUP), the party then in power; of Belize's independence from Britain in 1981; and of the influx of refugees from El Salvador and Haiti: "I do a job for twenty dollars, a Salvadoran does it for five." "What do you do?" I ask him. Some carpentry. A little painting—he painted the house across the road. "Farming?" Ab asks. He had tried, then Greta came. "Hunting?" He enjoys hunting, but it is mostly supplemental income. Few depend exclusively on hunting for their total income, none exclusively on alligators. They hunt animals—peccary, wild boar, gibnut, deer, alligator—when they can afford to, when the price is right. No one is hunting alligators now because the price for hides is too low.

The rain lets up and the stranger turns on his light, revealing a smiling, black face. He introduces himself as Rudolph, shakes hands with each of us, and disappears into the dark and the chorus of frogs that has started up again.

Rudolf's comments confirm what Ab has heard and observed in other places at other times. In 1980, when there was a great demand for hides, Belizeans received $5 US per linear foot; in 1984 the price dropped to $2/

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ft. That decline is felt keenly. Of an even greater disparity, though, most Belizean hunters remain ignorant. In Florida, prices for alligator hides, considered slightly inferior to Morelet's hides, run five to ten times higher than those in Belize: $25/ft. in 1980; $22/ft. in 1984.

For importers around the world, crocodiles provide raw material for pocketbooks that may bring as much as $1500 each. For Belizean hunters they provide money in the pocket. Rarely, if ever, do the hunters eat the meat. "This romantic idea we have of the hunter being at one with the prey, like the Kalahari huntsman that can look at the blade of grass and tell that the giraffe has a hurt left front foot—that doesn't obtain here," says Ab. "They know how to find the crocs, they know what kind of areas they live in. But basic things, like what time of year they breed, how many young they have, what they eat, how long they live—just none of that is available. It seems that they know just what's necessary to bring the animal in."

The best way to catch a crocodile has been discussed over the centuries. In *An Account of Egypt* Herodotus describes the method he found most notable among the Egyptians:

> A man puts the back of a pig upon a hook as bait, and lets it go into the middle of the river, while he himself upon the bank of the river has a young live pig, which he beats; and the crocodile hearing its cries makes for the direction of the sound, and when he finds the pig's back he swallows it down: then they pull, and when he is drawn out to land, first of all the hunter forthwith plasters up his eyes with mud, and having so done he very easily gets the mastery of him, but if he does not do so he has much trouble.

The techniques used by most contemporary Belizean hunters do not represent much of an improvement. Typically they use a quick and inefficient way. At nightfall they take a boat, usually a dug-out dory, onto the water and use a headlight to shine in the water for crocodiles and on the land for other prey. When they see something that looks good, they blast it with a shotgun. Many crocodiles are lost that way: some escape injured, others die without being recovered. The better hunters use a harpoon, and the best ones, who specialize in crocodiles, have a pole with a breakaway gig on the end. When they spot a crocodile and determine that it is of suitable size (the best hunters seldom kill hatchlings or juveniles), they jab the gig into it and play the animal on the attached line until they can bring it in and either shoot it or knock it in the head.

Ab and other crocophiles use similar equipment when catching crocs over five feet. Rather than jabbing a gig into the animal, though, they slip a noose over the nose and back around the neck. Then they pull the line, thus tightening the noose. A little rubber band attached to the end of the pole pulls loose or breaks and the crocodile is caught on the line. From there it is a matter of waiting, letting the animal thrash about in the water until it tires itself out—occasionally as long as a half hour. Once the animal is still, it is pulled into the boat or, if possible, onto a bank, where the mouth is taped with duct tape. After measurements are taken—the total length; the length and width of the snout; the length, width and depth of the head; and the length and width of the mandible tip—the tape is removed and the animal released.

Not all crocodiles in Belize are caught for financial or scientific reasons. The storekeeper in Bermudian Landing alludes to one such incident. "An alligator ate a man, you know." He waits for our response. "Here?" Cathy asks. "No, no. Up further." He gestures vaguely with his hand. "Was this recently?" "A few years ago." He seems annoyed at our efforts to tie the story down to a specific time and place. Ab knows the tale. Two boonierats on the 1980 trip had encountered it when working near Orange Walk Town. They interviewed various people about it, looked up newspaper accounts, and pieced together a version. On Good Friday a few men, perhaps brothers, went fishing in some ponds near Orange Walk Town. One of them disappeared in the water and could not be found. The next day his friends returned, dredged the pond, and found the man's partially eaten body. In the same pond they found a crocodile, which they duly shot and brought into Orange Walk Town, where it was put on display. A store in town sold pictures of both the man and the crocodile. Claims that the crocodile had killed the man rested on two pieces of evidence: 1) accounts of people who claimed to have seen the crocodile eating the man, and 2) the contents of the crocodile's stomach: a bit of the victim's flesh and clothing. Devout Hispanics in the area interpreted the incident as a sign from God that the man shouldn't have been fishing on Good Friday. Anglos tended to believe that the crocodile was a scavenger, that something or someone else was responsible for the actual death. Only one point seemed indisputable: the men did kill the crocodile.

I have visions of a similar scene the night I try to catch my first crocodile along the Macal River in the Maya Mountains. Earlier in the day we had driven up a narrow, bumpy road to the Guacamallo Bridge. A platoon of British infantry was camped on the other side of the bridge, but no soldiers were in sight when we put a canoe in the water. Having spent a week on the river earlier on the trip, Ab and Clint knew canoeing it was no easy task. We alternated dragging and paddling the canoe through shallow, rock-studded rapids and deep calm pools. In the second such pool, our efforts were rewarded: we spotted a crocodile. "About five feet," Ab said, "I think we have a pretty good chance of catching that one later tonight."

We return to the river late in the afternoon, in time to drag the canoes down to the second pool and cook supper before dark. At the bridge we meet several British soldiers cooling off from their day's exercises: one brushing his teeth in the river, a few wading in it, most dangling their bare feet over it from the bridge.

"Cro'odile!" they say when we explain our mission to them. The word sets off little explosions of conversation around us. Some pull their feet up from where they've been hanging over the water; others adopt a tone of bravado. Ab spots an officer standing in the distance and repeats the story to him. The lieutenant blinks and raises his chin slightly. They will be doing maneuvers the next day around the very spot where the crocodile was spotted. He would be very interested in seeing it. The others echo his sentiment. Whether out of fear or sport, the soldiers, I sense, have ill intentions toward the animal. But southern hospitality demands that Ab oblige. "We'll bring it up to camp for y'all to see—if we catch it. I'd say we have about a fifty/fifty chance of catching it."

Shortly after supper, the last embers of the day and our campfire fading, Ab and Clint set out in a

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canoe. Cathy and I shine our lights from an island of rocks near the shore. Martin Kellman, a plant biologist/geographer at York University in Ontario, whom we'd met the previous day, has joined us.

We scan the pool with our lights, but they are too weak to reach the opposite shore. The intermittent glow of fireflies distracts my attention. I begin to think that like certain constellations, crocodile eyes will be a configuration my eyes can never make sense of. Then we hear some splashing. Ab and Clint have reached the far shore, and at least one of them appears to be out of the boat.

"Are they hand-grabbing it?" My question falls like a stray note between movements. We strain to hear every sound: muffled talking, paddles banging against the canoe, more splashing. Then the steady, rhythmic sound of someone paddling. And a curious sound, one I haven't heard before—thin, but insistent: *er, er, er, er.* As the sound grows louder we can distinguish Clint sitting in the bow without paddling, and the moving paddle of Ab in the stern.

"Here," Clint says as the canoe nudges the rocks we are sitting on. He holds out a miniature crocodile to Cathy, who grabs it readily, one hand around its neck, the other behind its belly. I almost laugh in recognition. The sound coming from the open mouth of tiny, pointed teeth is the distress call of the young that I have heard about, sometimes called "yerking." In different company one might have called the varmint cute.

"That's a yearling, I believe. About two feet." Ab steps out of the canoe onto the rocks, obviously pleased. On his previous trip to the Macal he had not seen any young crocs.

"You want to hold it?" Cathy holds the crocodile out to Kellman.

"No, no." He backs away slightly. "I work with plants."

I am not as sure what my answer will be. The crocodile doesn't frighten me, but I don't have any impulse to reach out and touch it. Danger has nothing to do with it. Once, seeing a captive jaguar, I felt my hand moving towards it, despite the cat's snarl and long pointed teeth. My preference is for fur.

Ab gives me no time to decide. "There are at least three other crocs about that same size out there. Why don't y'all take Holly out to catch her first crocodile. Dr. Kellman and I will load up things here and take the other canoe back. We'll meet you up at the British camp." Ab hands me his headlamp.

Clint climbs in at the stern; Cathy sits in the middle, holding the yerking croc, and I sit in the bow. Five years before Ab had taken me whitewater canoeing. For no particular reason I had a picture of paddling around a little lake or down a gentle river. It wasn't until I saw the whitecaps of the rapids that it occurred to me what *whitewater* meant.

The water is calmer than I am tonight on the Macal. Clint and I paddle across the current and scan the water with our lights.

"Okay, Holly. See that one?" Clint speaks slowly, softly.

"No." Forgetting about my light, I shake my head and the beam jerks back and forth across the water.

"It's close to the shore, a little to your right."

I move my head slowly to the right. Near the shore, about thirty feet away, two red beads like candy jewels appear. "Okay. I see it."

"Let's try for that one."

I hold my paddle out of the water a moment. What if it is the five-foot crocodile? "What exactly do I do?"

"Just grab it," Clint says.

"With my hand?"

"It's a little scary the first time, but you get used to it," says Cathy. "Grab it behind the neck. That way it can't bite you."

"Why don't you put your paddle up?" suggests Clint.

I slide it under my seat and we drift towards the eyes. I keep my beam moving, but the red eyes remain steady. As we approach them I can see that they are small and close together.

"What side do you want him on?"

"The right. I guess."

Clint angles the boat slightly to the left and turns off his light. I keep my eyes on the red orbs until they become attached to a small, yellow-green body, spread-eagled near the surface of the water. Clint has brought me up on it perfectly. One fell swoop can pluck it out of the water.

I hold my hand above the water, hesitating slightly at the last moment when I feel it aiming for the belly—the broadest part of the animal—instead of the neck. My hand crashes through the water, the crocodile folds its legs against its sides and dives under.

Circling around, we try again. Cathy makes the captive croc yerk to attract the other. The eyes surface again. But a branch gets in the way of the canoe and the croc slips out of sight. The third time it is just too quick. We give up and head upsteam.

"You've probably saved that crocodile's life," Clint says. "Teaching it to be scared of light."

No lights are on when we arrive at the British camp, but a few shouts bring the soldiers tumbling out of their hammocks. Zipping and buttoning up their pants, they run towards us.

"We're a little bit ashamed to bring this up here. It's not what we promised," Ab says. The soldiers gather around Cathy and the crocodile, which has grown silent.

"It's a li'l one." They poke at it and thump it on the snout.

"Give it a li'l creamcake," says one soldier to another who is holding up a finger to the crocodile's snout.

I wait for the crocodile to snap, but his jaws are frozen.

"It might bite you," says Ab.

"Bite me and I'll knock your head off." The soldier lifts the skin around the crocodile's teeth, then tries to pry open its mouth.

"They're really pretty harmless, even the bigger ones," Ab says. He sounds a little nervous. "They are a protected species, you know. It's against the law to kill them."

A few more pokes and the soldiers seem satisfied. They meander back to their hammocks. Ab and Clint head back downstream to release the crocodile.

"How big does a crocodile have to be before it will attack a person?" I ask Ab the next day. I know something of the conditions under which people hunt crocodiles, but I am less sure of

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the conditions in the reverse situation. I remind him of the Orange Walk Town incident.

"An eight-foot crocodile doesn't have enough size advantage on a full-grown, healthy, adult human being to make it look like a tempting target. The person's too close to its own size. Now I think, say, a sixteen-to-eighteen foot American crocodile probably would not hesitate to take a person in the water at the right time and the right place. Or an Asian saltwater, who's a confirmed predator on people. If you were in a big lake and it knew you were in the lake, it would probably stalk you, unless it had just eaten or it was a cool day. But that would never happen here. The crocs are just too small."

Bites are a more common hazard. Ab estimates he's been bitten close to thirty times by alligators in Florida, where he has worked the past two years for the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, and a few times by crocodiles. The bites themselves have not been bad, but the danger of infection makes him nervous. A crocodilian over four feet is likely to have a constant resident population of *Aeromonas hydrophila* bacteria, and a person bitten by one can develop a severe infection. Ab contracted such an infection in 1983 when an alligator bit him. The infection spread rapidly and required twenty million units of penicillin. He thinks twice now before grabbing large animals, especially in Belize, where he could be several days away from antibiotics. "This is the first trip I can remember where I haven't been bitten," he says, slightly bemused.

Clint did not escape injury entirely. Earlier on the trip he and Ab had caught a five-foot crocodile on the Macal. Clint was holding its mouth shut when the croc twisted its head and sliced his palm with a lower protruding tooth. By the time Cathy and I arrived in Belize the wound had healed almost completely. He was afraid there would be no scar.

Tall and slender, with straight, sandy hair covered perpetually by a camouflage cap, Clint impressed me with his ability to catch and identify critters and parts of critter. One day along the bank of the Belize River, I found a small dark feather. In the sunlight it shimmered blue and green. "Whose is this?" I asked him. He turned it over several times, then said, "It's either the sixth or seventh tertial of an *Aratinga*." Another morning at a campground in the Maya Mountains, I saw him sitting on top of a wooden picnic table, directing the movements of a scorpion with a pine needle. I thought I'd caught him in an act of little boy sadism. "What are you doing, torturing it?" He pointed with the needle to a knothole in the table. "I'm trying to get it into there. That's where it wants to go. They like to hide."

In Belize City, stopped for R-and-R between crocodile escapades, we do more people-watching than creature-watching. The 1980 census lists the population at forty thousand, not quite a third of the population of the entire country; but once inside the city it is impossible to tell. Narrow and crowded with people, the streets wind, maze-like, through the city. Street signs seem nonexistent; few traffic signs regulate traffic. In the forest, even in the dark, Ab can recognize the turn-around point on a road he drove down once two years before, paddle through a series of lagoons separated by tangles of reeds without losing his bearing, and pace off the exact distance from a road to a creek. But Belize City stumps him: he drives aimlessly up and down streets, often having to back out when one suddenly dead-ends or he discovers it is one-way, going the opposite direction. Sooner or later we will get there.

The first time I saw Belize City I thought it picturesque. Down the block from our hotel the large, red-orange flowers of the royal poinciana or flame tree were silhouetted against a blue sky; coconut palm fronds slapped in the wind; blue land crabs popped out of holes in the ground and skittered across the road. The wooden houses built on stilts seemed practical, providing not only protection from the frequent hurricanes, but also a cool, shaded place underneath to wash and hang laundry. Close up, though, these postcard views disappear. The blue Caribbean, stately ships anchored on its horizon, becomes murky brown Haulover Creek filled with barges and trash. A little girl playing along the street is actually fishing something out of the sewer. Other sensations not hinted at by postcards become predominant: the fetid odors of the creek and sewer, the heavy dampness of the air. I understand later why a promotional film *This Is Belize* included only one frame of Belize City: an aerial view.

Native Belizeans comprise a number of ethnic groups: Creoles, Amerindians, Caribs, Mestizos, and, to a lesser extent, Lebanese, Asians, and Europeans. A visitor detects little or no racial tension. Like the different shades of brown skin, the demarcation of classes seems gradual, slight, noticeable only to those directly involved. In part this harmony can probably be attributed to an equality of circumstance. Though there is some evidence of wealth in the northern part of Belize City (what Dan Sanborn's travel booklet labels N.R.A.: Nice Residential Area), most Belizeans are poor. The average annual income is quoted at $1000 US. But it is not a poverty of utter despair. We see no children with bare, bloated bellies. They look well cared for and well groomed. School girls wear neat, pressed uniforms and hold hands on their way to school; little boys run after us and ask for money to support their soccer team. I encounter only one instance of actual begging: a small boy with watery eyes holding a small, wrapped caramel. At first I think he wants to sell it to me. Then it becomes clear he wants both the money and the candy: "Please, you give me some money for sweets. I haven't eaten all day," he says mournfully. A strange pitch. Why doesn't he eat the sweet he has? And if he really hasn't eaten all day wouldn't it be better to use the money for more substantial food? I think of the toothless man in Bermudian Landing and reluctantly hand over a dollar.

Most Belizeans strike me as looking more for a deal than a free ride. At Mom's Triangle, a Belize City restaurant popular among Americans, men with dreadlocks come to our table selling carved wooden objects or offering to take us to the cays (pronounced "keys"). When we refuse they merely shrug. On a bulletin board near the restrooms (marked *Ladies* and *Dads*) hang notices offering boats and vehicles. Signs on the wall advertise various resorts:

Alta Vista

Would you like to stay on a nice place
with a wonderful and magnificent view
over the Macao-Bank-Valley on the
River-
side of the Macal River?
FOR 12 BELIZE-DOLLAR
PERNIGHT
with food you can relax

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Some Belizeans are interested in buying as well as selling. "Nice canoes," people say everywhere we go. "How much?"

Sampling the prices of a few appliances in the stores, I understand why Belizeans are so eager to bargain. A wringer washing machine sells for $950 US, a small color TV for $400, an ice cream maker for $87. On the streets vendors sell native produce: mangoes, soursops, plantains, three-inch bananas, pineapples, peanuts, and cashews. But even among these locally grown items there is often an unexpected imported good—a bag of marshmallows, women's underwear. The shelves in grocery stores are filled with such goods: canned meat from Denmark, cookies from Mexico, matches from China, coffee from the U.S., tea from the United Kingdom. Even when a local brand is available it is often more expensive than the foreign brand: Shurfine peanut butter costs less than the Belizean brand.

A whole culture or, rather, a grab bag of cultures has been imported to Belize. The music is American pop, the best restaurants Chinese. There are no brightly colored, locally woven fabrics such as those in Haiti or Guatemala; people in Belize wear clothes off the rack—cotton and polyester dresses, jeans, tennis shoes, and t-shirts commemorating people, places, and things they will never know: Michael Jackson, the Incredible Hulk, Yale, Harvard, San Diego State, Adidas, the *New Yorker*. A few shops sell carvings made of native mahogany, but a visitor looking for other handcrafted items will be disappointed.

When I share a few of my observations about Belize with Ab, he nods. "It's a written-in-capital-letters, underlined-twice example of a society that's been created by the world capitalistic system. It's one of those countries that was particularly designed—I mean on paper, probably in London by somebody—to exploit the 'tropical riches of the area' for the exclusive benefit of the mother country. And the folks who would be here to do the exploiting—well, you could make a little more money off them if, instead of encouraging self-sufficiency and agriculture, you could encourage them to spend their money buying the mother country's agro-industrial produce. Developing a market by getting free trees is in a sense the history of Belize. And I think that carries on in some degree to the present day."

"Where do crocodiles fit in?

"Crocodiles are one example of a tie-in between natural resources and the people who might exploit them. They are a way of looking at developing nations. How a developing nation treats its wildlife tells you a lot about what is going on in that country."

Just how far crocodiles have penetrated my own psyche I am not sure. A week before I left for Belize I had a dream in which I was sitting in a canoe surrounded by baby crocodiles. Two nights before we left Belize (the night after we shone for crocs from the road near Orange Walk Town) the dream came true. Paddling through a twisting maze of marsh-lakes called Merry-Go-Round, we sighted seventeen hatchlings, two yearlings, and one juvenile. A bright half moon and a star-studded sky cast a glow over the serrated edges of lily pads. Even the little crocodiles seemed prettier than usual, with intricate black markings set against a yellowish background. After several attempts I caught one with ease.

Seeing the baby crocodiles, both in my dream and in Belize, had allayed my anxiety about the critters, and their presence was, of course, an encouraging sign about the well-being of the Morelet's population. But in some respects the trip had been a disappointment: I had not seen a crocodile perform the regal "high walk," raising its belly off the ground; I had not heard a crocodile bellow, and, except for eyes, I had not even seen a large crocodile. The majesty of the large creature had escaped me. Yet their wariness gave me hope for their survival.

As the sole surviving order of the subclass *Archosauria*, which includes two orders of dinosaurs and the flying reptiles, crocodilians have been around in one form or another for the past 200 million years. The order as a whole has overcome many threats to its survival. For the individual crocodilian, however, survival is a daily feat—especially for the young. The nests can be destroyed by floods, excessive heat, ant attacks, and raids by mammalians and reptiles. Hatchlings can fall prey to predators both on land and in the water. To some extent parental care provided by the mother mitigates these dangers. But a crocodilian is not really in the clear until it becomes an adult, which can take as long as twelve years. From that point it can live up to fifty years, its size and armor-like skin making it practically invulnerable to attack from almost anything—except people.

Homo sapiens poses a less predictable threat to crocodiles. Over the centuries our actions toward them have been motivated variously by fear, superstition, veneration, fascination, economic necessity, greed, bravado, and vanity. And yet the reappearance of Morelet's in Belize seems to suggest a strategy here. Their ability to survive has stemmed at least as much from their wariness as from their ferocity. Barring massacre or massive habitat destruction, this animal can survive using age-old tactics: lay low, hide out, avoid artificial light.

The survival of Morelet's rests, of course, at least in part upon the survival of Belize itself. As an underdeveloped country, Belize faces many internal problems. In *Beka Lamb*, a novel about a young girl growing up in Belize, Zee Edgell highlights one such problem—a high emigration rate—and suggests a reason for it. When Beka is puzzled by a Belizean doctor's return to England, her grandmother tells her a story about the day the circus came to town. With the circus was a polar bear—"a ting Belize people never see befo." On the second day of the circus's stay, the ice factory breaks down and the polar bear dies. "Nothin' lasts here," says Gran. "Tings bruk down."

Still, on the scale of human suffering, Belize is more fortunate than its neighbors—Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras. It has no severe class or racial struggles. Belizeans do not live in fear of being gunned down by their government or neighbor or brother. If things break down, it is more often at the mechanical level—the power shuts off, a bridge washes out, a truck full of oranges turns over and holds up traffic for five or six hours. If much of the world is not aware of their existence, they need not be too concerned: in Central America anonymity can be a good thing. Belizeans can take heart they live in a country where a man being eaten by a crocodile is news. □

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Great Moments in Greek Mythology

KENNETH LASH

PHYSICIAN: And what precisely is the nature of your disorder?

ZEUS: That's just it, I can't tell. I'll be going along feeling fine and all of a sudden for no reason I feel bad. It's not what I eat; I've been vomiting regularly.

PHYSICIAN: Exertion perhaps? Does it come on after strenuous tasks?

ZEUS: No, I could understand that. For example, the kids have been misbehaving all week and I've had to hurl a lot of thunderbolts, but it hasn't affected me at all as far as I can tell.

PHYSICIAN: And is there a specific pain that accompanies your malaise?

ZEUS: Yes, right here.

PHYSICIAN: In the head? Behind the ear? Let's have a look. Oh dear.

ZEUS: What's the matter?

PHYSICIAN: I'm afraid I have bad news for you.

ZEUS: Eh?

PHYSICIAN: Furthermore, it appears to be a girl.

ZEUS: Ah, is that it? Athena's coming on?

PHYSICIAN: This is most irregular.

ZEUS: I don't want to talk about it.

DAEDALUS (some year): The Labyrinth is finished, Sire.

KING MINOS: Good. May I see it now?

DAEDALUS: I'm afraid not. Indeed, I hope you never do.

KING MINOS: You mean I couldn't find my way out? Fine, that was the point. But surely with you to guide me? . . .

DAEDALUS: No, it is proof even from me. That is the achievement of my craft. You see, I built it from the center outward. Twisting and turning without reason or expectation, like life itself. Doubling back, moving sideways, each space an exact replica of the other, there is no way to know whether you go forward or back. It will feel like a man attempting to elude Fate. My purpose was to follow no other plan than to mystify, and that I have done. I could find my way there no better than you.

KING MINOS: It seems a shame not to be able to see what I have paid for. Still, it will be accounted a marvel I doubt not, and will suit the Minotaur well. I can pop him in now?

DAEDALUS: Oh yes, with perfect confidence that whatever you send after to feed him will not escape.

KING MINOS: *Whomever.*

DAEDALUS: Ah . . . yes.

KING MINOS (some year later): You heard that Theseus has slain the Minotaur and, what's more, found his way back out of the Labyrinth?

DAEDALUS: Yes, I'm sorry. However was it done?

KING MINOS: *Sorry?* This monument of craft, so mystifying that none who entered would ever again see the light of day?

DAEDALUS: He must have had help from the gods. Only they—

KING MINOS: He had help from my teenage daughter, Ariadne, who has the brains of a fish. She gave him a long piece of string—

DAEDALUS: A piece of string?

KING MINOS: You're a bungler, Daedalus. Might as well think to fly as put trust in the work of one such as you.

DAEDALUS: Fly? Did you say *fly*?

FIRST SHEPHERD: What in the names of heaven are those? Look!

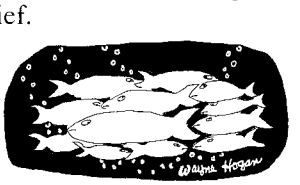
SECOND SHEPHERD: Looks like a man and a boy to me.

FIRST SHEPHERD: But they're *flying*!

SECOND SHEPHERD: Oh, aye.

FIRST SHEPHERD: They're flying as easily as birds! What a marvel. They must be gods, surely?

SECOND SHEPHERD: Up to mischief.



FIRST SHEPHERD: Is that a joke?

SECOND SHEPHERD: I don't know. The little one's going right up into the sun. He'll get a burn he won't soon forget.

FIRST SHEPHERD: He's falling into the sea! His wings have come off! Oh my. . . .

SECOND SHEPHERD: I don't like that at all.

FIRST SHEPHERD: You don't—

SECOND SHEPHERD: Means they're not gods. Their wings don't fall off.

FIRST SHEPHERD: Maybe they're trying out a new kind.

SECOND SHEPHERD: Better to have stuck to the old.

FIRST SHEPHERD: Is that a joke? . . .

ADMIRER: You really diverted two rivers to clean the Augean stables?

HERCULES: How else would you have me do it, with a shovel?

ADMIRER: Those twelve labors of yours are unparalleled—the Nemean Lion, the Hydra, the Cretan bull, the Golden Apples of the Hesperides . . . no other man could have done them all. I doubt another among us could have done even one of them.

HERCULES: Oh I don't know about that. Favored of the gods, we Greeks are becoming a race of strong men.

ADMIRER: Yes, it's another time now. Not like the Age of Silver, those feeble and inept men who obeyed their mothers. Still, is there another like you to be found in all Greece?

HERCULES: In all Greece? Of the best among us? Well, perhaps not to accomplish all twelve feats, but to do one or two? I think such men exist. Possibly quite a number of them, if they could be discovered.

ADMIRER: What if we were to institute a contest? A contest for champions? Open to all men from all the kingdom. Dedicate it to the gods, call it The Olympiad?

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HERCULES: They'd like that, I believe.

ADMIRER: But wait! In many of your labors you had their help?

HERCULES: Oh yes, often.

ADMIRER: Thus, so will the contestants in our Olympiad, this one favored by one god, that by another?

HERCULES: No doubt. Discord and Jealousy exist on Olympus as here below.

ADMIRER: Maybe we better forget it. No sense stirring things up.

HERCULES: Well, let's think about it.

ADMIRER (to himself): He'll do it. There's a lot of mischief in these heroes. They're agents of the gods after all, and the gods do like to make sport of us mortals. We are as—

ATHENA: I heard that!

APOLLO: So did I. Let's turn him into something.

ATHENA: Good. You're the sun god. How about a ball of fire?

APOLLO: All right. And we'll cause him to enter the Olympiad.

ATHENA: Yes, and just as he's about to win the race I'll turn him into a walnut tree.

APOLLO: What a nutty idea.

ATHENA: Are you making fun of me?

APOLLO: No, I just—

ATHENA: Because if you are I swear by Zeus I'll cause you to regret it.

APOLLO: You know, for a goddess of wisdom you're awfully impulsive.

ATHENA: And for a sun god you're not very bright.

APOLLO: What you need is a man. This virgin business—

ATHENA: Like to try it, sunny-boy?

EUDORA: . . . and by Hippodameia Pelops had several children, among them Atreus and Thyestes. By another wife he had a son Chrysippus, whom he particularly loved. At Hippodameia's instigation Atreus and Thyestes murdered Chrysippus and for this crime were forced to go into exile. They reached Mycenae. At the death of Eurystheus, King of Mycenae, Atreus succeeded to the throne. His brother Thyestes was jealous and seduced the wife of Atreus, Aerope, and in addition stole from him a ram with a golden fleece which had been a present from Hermes. He was driven from Mycenae but left Pleisthenes to avenge him. Now Pleisthenes was Atreus' son, who had been brought up by Thyestes as his own son. Pleisthenes was on the point of striking down Atreus, but Atreus killed him instead, realizing too late that it was his son. To avenge himself Atreus pretended to be reconciled with Thyestes and invited him and his children to return to Mycenae. In the course of a feast he served to Thyestes the bodies of two of his sons. The sun, it was said, hid in order not to cast light on such a crime. Later Atreus was killed by Aegisthus, another son of Thyestes, whom Atreus had brought up with his own children, Agamemnon and Menelaus, who in their turn were murdered: Agamemnon by Aegisthus who was living in adultery with Agamemnon's wife, Clytemnestra, and eight years later Aegisthus and Clytemnestra perished at the hand of her son, Orestes. And that is the story of the Atreus family. Now go to sleep, children.

THETIS: All right, here's the Styx. Hand me Achilles.

NURSE: Poor baby, the water looks so cold. Dip him quickly, won't you, or he'll catch his death.

THETIS: It's to prevent his catching his death that we dip him. This is the enchanted water that will serve him as armour all his life.

NURSE: But wait! You're going to hold him by the ankle? What of the spot beneath your fingers? Dip him twice, changing your hold.

THETIS: I may not. But what sword attacks the ankle? What arrow?

NURSE: With marksmen the way they are today? Slaves and curly haired boys pressed into service? And what of snakes, pray? Snakes love the ankle. It's their Sunday joint.

THETIS: Well, what do you suggest?

NURSE: You could hold him by the—

THETIS: Oh for heaven's sake! . . .

DIONYSUS: You're such a drunkard, it's a wonder you can keep your seat on the ass.

SILENUS: And vice-versa.

DIONYSUS: And yet I suppose when we get to Phrygia you'll have something critical to say about my orgy.

SILENUS: No doubt, but I don't know what it'll be.

DIONYSUS: Why not?

SILENUS: You know very well I can't think unless I have a hangover. Thinking's no occupation for a happy man.

DIONYSUS: And vice-versa. Happiness is no occupation for—

SILENUS: Yes, yes. We do enjoy turning things this way and that. Your father, by the way, is not a witty man.

DIONYSUS: That's not his job.

SILENUS: He may come to think it is not yours either.

DIONYSUS: Then he shouldn't have given me dominion over the vine.

SILENUS: *In vino veritas.*

DIONYSUS: What language is that?

SILENUS: One yet to come. Vulgar, isn't it? Let's stop a bit, take the pause that refreshes. Otherwise I'll be thinking soon, and thus but poor company.

DIONYSUS: What? Old Si? Fat Si? But poor company? Rich in ribaldry, wealthy of wit, an all-round model fellow, which is to say in girth composed like the very roundness of the globe? Poor in perseverance, terrible in temperance, honest in depravity and false as any man? May such an one be poor company? Nay, though he be less by half and more by infirmity, still would I count him such company as only Zeus himself could send to plague me. Thou great tent o'guts, thou jeroboam, thou loaf, thou false a staff as ever a poor god had to lean upon. . . .

SILENUS: Whoa! What language is that?

DIONYSUS: I don't know. Has a nice ring to it though, doesn't it?

AURORA (some year): Tithonus! Tithonus! Father has said yes!

TITHONUS: Zeus has agreed to allow me immortality?

AURORA: He has!

TITHONUS: Now that's what I call a handsome wedding gift.

AURORA: We shall be together through all eternity!

AURORA (some year later): What's this, Tithonus? A gray hair?

TITHONUS: What? Where? O my gods. So that's why I've been feeling. . . .

AURORA: Feeling what?

TITHONUS: You dummy! You asked him for immortality and forgot to include eternal youth!

AURORA: I did? Oh my. . . .

TITHONUS: I'm going to live to be a million years old!

AURORA: Mmmmm. How would you like to have your own room? □

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NEIL EVERNDEN

CONSTRUCTING THE NATURAL

The Darker Side of the Environmental Movement

The Use and Abuse of Ecology

One of the more interesting products of the sociobiology debate is a small volume by Marshall Sahlins entitled *The Use and Abuse of Biology*. Whether or not one is persuaded to Sahlins' view of sociobiology, his reminder about the creation and subsequent use of biological theory is timely and important. The nature we "discover" is too often a cultural artifact, planted for discovery in our continuing intellectual scavenger hunt. Sahlins' concerns may also be relevant to some aspects of the environmental movement, such as the popular search for an ecological or environmental ethic.

Ecology has achieved a surprisingly high profile in the past decade, although its "vulgar" form in the popular press may bear little resemblance to the academic original. In the present context, the fact that there may be different "ecologies" is significant in itself. However, my initial concern is with the use of the term in connection with diagnoses of worldly ills and pleas for behavioral rehabilitation. Many who consider themselves environmentalists are of the opinion that environmental degradation is symptomatic of social malaise, and as a consequence they advocate a change to a healthier relationship with the non-human world. Many alternatives are proposed, but I think it is fair to say that most revolve around a small-scale lifestyle and the reduction of hierarchical organization.[1] Perhaps most important, part of the argument in support of these new proposals is usually derived from ecology, at least by implication. Essentially, ecology is used as the arbiter of "naturalness," and therefore as a guide to the re-orientation of human society.

It is unfair arbitrarily to lump together all who have leaned upon ecology in constructing arguments for social change, for there are certainly significant differences among them. But it is interesting that ecology can easily be used in support of different arguments for change, be it change to the bio-egalitarianism of Arne Naess, the neo-anarchism of Murray Bookchin, or even to the adoption of some form of Leopoldian land ethic. Exactly what is advocated is of less interest here than the fact that ecology often functions as the exemplar of the natural and healthy, and in so functioning seems to indicate to us how we ought to re-orient our lives. Indeed, it is almost inescapable that it will be so used, if our understanding of ecology is such that we consider this a part of its function. Definitions of ecology such as that used by Theodore Roszak certainly reinforce that belief:

> Ecology has been called "the subversive science"—and with good reason. Its sensibility—wholistic, receptive, trustful,

1. See, for example, Sigmund Kvaløy, "Ecophilosophy and Ecopolitics: Thinking and Acting in Response to the Threats of Ecocatastrophe," *North American Review* 260 (Summer, 1974): 17-28.

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largely non-tampering, deeply grounded in aesthetic intuition—is a radical deviation from traditional science. Ecology does not systematize by mathematical generalization or materialist reductionism, but by the almost sensuous intuiting of natural harmonies on the largest scale. Its patterns are not those of numbers, but of unity in process; its psychology borrows from Gestalt and is an awakening awareness of wholes greater than the sum of their parts.[2]

The implication seems to be that ecology will help us to "feel" our way into a healthier relationship with the world, revealing to us the "natural harmonies" which are essential to our survival and happiness. Roszak's wishful ecology is one many would sympathize with, but not one that would be recognized as any kin to academic ecology. In that literature, we are more likely to find reference to "the myth of the balance-of-nature" and claims that "the success of the materialist revolution in other disciplines, particularly evolution and genetics, augurs well for ecology. . ."[3] Even so, what ecology is may be less important than what it is seen to be, and Roszak's may yet be the more significant description. Nature knows best, and ecology knows nature.

It is easy to understand how a more convenient ecology comes to be created in support of a program for social action. But to a lesser extent, the same tendency can be found in the most careful of academic literature. For example, one very thoughtful author has suggested that "the basic concept behind an ecological ethic is that morally acceptable treatment of the environment is that which does not upset the integrity of the ecosystem as it is seen in a diversity of life forms existing in a dynamic and complex but stable interdependency."[4] He also refers to words which are used both conversationally and in a "strictly scientific, value-neutral" sense: *balance*, *integrity*, *order*, and *health*. He concludes that "stability and diversity are both facts about a healthy ecosystem and values which we find in such a system."[5] Certainly, the terms are so used, and concepts such as stability and diversity have been regarded by some as ecosystemic virtues. But he neglects to mention other terms which share this joint societal/ecological usage, terms like *competition*, *exclusion*, *exploitation*, and *survival*. Such words are less likely to be seized upon by those aspiring to establish the groundwork for an ecological ethic or an environmentally benign lifestyle, yet they are every bit as much a part of ecology. Indeed, given the evolutionary emphasis in much ecological work, one could argue that competition forms a much more significant topic for research than does mutualism or balance. In choosing to ignore the "dark" side of ecology, even well-intentioned authors inadvertently create a new ecology to better serve their purposes, i.e., to better substantiate their arguments.

However, if such authors can be criticized for emphasizing certain aspects at the expense of others, there are many others who could be accused of the reverse bias. To this point I have spoken only of the use of ecology in support of social reform. There is, however, a much heavier reliance on ecology in support of the status quo. I speak of the use of ecology in such officially sanctioned activities as environmental impact assessment, wildlife management, and land reclamation. While these may be useful in the immediate support of environmental integrity, they illustrate the use of ecology as an informant of technological and bureaucratic intervention. There is a tacit expectation that some form of environmental engineering must emerge which will facilitate continued growth with a minimum of environmental backlash. Ecology is to help us anticipate difficulties, so that alternative technologies can be forged to circumvent them. This role seems implicitly encouraged by ecologists who claim that "so long as we interest ourselves in prediction, we will make meaningful, practical statements about our environment. It is the sum of such statements which is the science of ecology, and this alone allows us some control over our collective future."[6] Indeed, one could cynically conclude that the role of the ecologist is to identify niches for humans to expropriate. Once the means of livelihood of a creature is known, it is up to us to mimic its adaptations through "appropriate technology" so that the human niche can be successfully expanded. To those who equate human biomass with the amount of good in the world, this might seem a noble enterprise (manifest destiny?). And all of us, dependent as we are on the holding back of succession so as to facilitate the monocultures we rely on for food, have a stake in the application of ecological knowledge.

These are two contrasting interpretations of the function of ecology. Undoubtedly they are caricatures of actual attitudes and assumptions, but they serve to illustrate the possibility of alternative uses of ecology. Persons with contrasting viewpoints can draw upon this discipline, one group regarding it as a revealer of the natural and proper, the other as a source of power and control (which it is natural for us to use). Each group believes its stance to be correct, and expects endorsement from ecology. But before discussing the implications of this phenomenon, it might be instructive to consider a hypothetical use (or abuse) of ecology. If, for the purpose of illustrating a point, I can ask the reader to let his or her fancy run free for a moment, we may find further cause to

2. Theodore Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends*, (New York, Doubleday, 1972), p. 400.

3. Daniel Simberloff, "A Succession of Paradigms in Ecology: Essentialism to Materialism and Probabalism," *Synthese* 43 (1980), p. 30.

4. Don E. Marietta Jr., "The Interrelationship of Ecological Science and Environmental Ethics," *Environmental Ethics* 1 (1979) p. 197. Marietta outlines a phenomenological approach to the problem, but is criticized by Tom Regan ("On the Connection Between Environmental Science and Environmental Ethics," *Environmental Ethics* 2 (1980): 363-366) for running aground of the "is/ought" impasse. This difficulty is implicit in the uses described above, but is beyond the intended range of the discussion. For a review of the philosophical approach to this kind of argument from ecology, see J. Baird Callicott, "Hume's Is/Ought Dichotomy and the Relation of Ecology to Leopold's Land Ethic," *Environmental Ethics* 4 (1982): 163-174.

5. Marietta, p. 201.

6. Robert Henry Peters, "From Natural History to Ecology," *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 21 (1980), p. 202.

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question the wisdom of looking to ecology for social instruction.

The Alien Ecologist's Dilemma

Thus far, I have simply tried to remind the reader of the interaction between belief and discovery, and of the possibility of using a particular body of knowledge in support of alternative and possibly conflicting goals. Ecology cannot be presumed to be the exclusive ally of the environmental movement, for it provides information that could just as well be used to manipulate nature as to defend it. Nor is there any reason to assume that the findings of ecology provide credibility for environmentalists' social prescriptions. They could just as easily suggest a refined continuance of the status quo. In fact, ecology could even suggest a kind of behavior that neither environmentalist nor industrialist would be likely to regard as desirable. As an exercise in perversity, and in the interests of discouraging overly-sanctimonious behavior among fellow environmental sympathizers, I offer the following scenario. I should stress at the outset that it is offered in illustration, rather than as an alternative to current assumptions. It should also be noted that while I have drawn on various bits of ecological observation to construct this illustration, I do not mean to imply that any ecologist has actually suggested such an explanation.

Suppose that an uncommitted observer could study us as simply one organism among a multitude. This person is familiar with many ecological concepts, but not with the species at hand. We could scarcely expect an extra-terrestrial to arrive with such knowledge, so perhaps we should think of our alien as an earth-born ecologist with selective amnesia. This disorder allows him access to general principles but to only fragmentary knowledge of individual species. He is essentially an educated observer of a strange biota.

As he explores his new-found world, he notices various creatures behaving in familiar ways, and is able to associate them with the knowledge of ecological roles that he possesses. He finds predators and parasites, opportunists and generalists, autotrophs and heterotrophs, and so on. Soon he discovers humans, or at least the industrial society he takes as the prototype of the species, without realizing any kinship. And he finds himself perplexed, for this creature seems to resist his categorizations. He finds its seemingly destructive behavior and fecundity surprising, and searches his memory for any parallels. But the creature seems to defy his typologies—it just doesn't fit.

After a good sleep and a period of reflection, our ecologist begins to remember fragments of research he had conducted or read about. He remembers that unusually large numbers of a species may occur in some situations, as is frequently the case at high latitudes. He may remember that some species occasionally appear to dominate a community, only to shrink to insignificance a year or two later. That in turn might cause him to reflect on the puzzle of stability and instability, and on why some species seem able to self-regulate while others reveal their incompetence through fluctuation. And once this train of thought is initiated, he might also remember attempts made by colleagues to find out what is "wrong" with species that are so poor at regulation as to condemn themselves to these boom-and-bust cycles of existence. And finally he might remember the ingenious suggestion that the species which seem most in jeopardy through this apparent regulatory flaw may in fact enjoy a more certain future than do the stable species.[7]

In a partial remission of his amnesia, our ecologist may recall the example of the Great Lakes fisheries, in which a stable species was carefully managed for "maximum sustained yield." In spite of these apparently far-sighted managerial habits, the fish population declined and never recovered. On the other hand, there are many creatures which, like locusts, are dramatically unstable and yet seem able to persist. He remembers, in the case of the fisheries, the suggestion that the good management practices had so consistently strained the propensities of the population that a small additional stress was sufficient to alter its entire mode of being. That is, the species in question was one which could not alter its "strategy" of existence, but only the terms of its occupancy contract. Under pressure, it shifted from one domain to another, from one "norm" of population size to a lower one. Although this species was stable, it did not possess resilience necessary to withstand a change in the conditions of existence. The only accommodation it was able to make was to go on doing the same thing but on a more modest scale.

In contrast, the other extreme is represented by species which seem to respond to conditions on an *ad hoc* basis. The way of being of such a species is uncertain, but not fragile. There is no "right way," in terms of population size, no neat accounting of numbers. Such a species is said to be unstable but resilient. In assessing the viability of the two, one might conclude that the important point is not so much how stable a species is within its domain but how vulnerable it is to a precipitate shift from one norm to another, that is, to a different configuration of existence. Since the fish is likely to make such a shift, then the management strategy adopted was precisely the wrong one. Maximum sustained yield, that most rational of our means of using "renewable resources," simply set the fish up for a fall. If we believe that nature is manageable, it will appear to be so. But then again, it could turn its other, "unmanageable" face toward us when we least expect it.

All these are fleeting recollections to our detached observer, but his line of thought is drawing him toward consideration of this other category of creature, the unstable but resilient one. He thinks of the spruce budworm, scourge of the softwood forestry industry and cherished only by the occasional environmentalist (who is more concerned about the effects of spraying programs than about the creature itself). Actually, "outbreaks" of

7. Most of the details in this section are derived from the paper by C.S. Holling, "Resilience and Stability of Ecological Systems," *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics* 4 (1973): 1-23. However, it would be unfair to associate him in any way with the speculative discussion in which his examples are employed.

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this insect had been quite rare until the assault by foresters commenced. There have been only six recorded eruptions since the early 1700s, apparently all the consequence of an unusual coincidence of dry years with an abundance of mature balsam fir, the favored food of the budworm. Given those circumstances, a dramatic increase in accommodation and recruitment occurs, and the population swells to a size that can affect the forest. The decimation of the balsam fir permits an increase in spruce and birch, species that are gradually edged out by the fir, and results in a kind of refurbishing of the spruce-fir-birch association upon which the budworm and a variety of other species depend. This particular association appears to require such periodic, selective rampages by the budworm. Of course, the forestry industry is not particularly interested in such niceties, and would prefer a monoculture of economically significant species. Hence, the futile battle to prevent the budworm from completing its project of community rejuvenation. The unstable, resilient budworm is—through no "intent" of its own, presumably—the indispensable key to the existence of a whole community. The budworm is not a "pest" in this context, but a functioning part of the process we describe as an organic community.

At this point, our damaged ecologist detects a straw to grasp at, a category which may accommodate his anomalous creature and bring relief to his taxonomic mind. Perhaps this puzzling primate is, like the budworm, an agent of ecological renewal. Perhaps the dissemination and devastation which seem so characteristic are simply the manifestations of a kind of locust-being that is essential to the rejuvenation of aging systems. Perhaps this creature's strange fixation on the setting back of succession is indicative of its natural role. And perhaps what he has before him is a "global budworm," a creature ideally suited to its role. Its essence is destruction, and in destroying it fulfills its destiny and its obligation to the biotic community. Unlike the miniscule and geographically contained efforts of its insect analogues, this exquisitely adapted organism executes its responsibilities on a planetary scale. Earth can be renewed through the devastation wrought by mankind. The mystery of the anomalous behavior is resolved, and our distraught ecologist can once again sleep contentedly.

But while the ecologist might sleep well, his conclusions could hardly have a soporific effect on those who take their environmental responsibilities seriously. For if his behavioral taxonomy was accurate, then the one thing that is "natural" for us is to lay waste the countryside and not, as environmentalists might suggest, to enter into a long-term stable relationship which will arrest the rate of destruction. Given the role of global budworm, it would seem imperative that we set back succession and then decline to our former modest numbers. What would be inexcusable is accomplishing the decimation and then refusing to subside. Therefore, finding some accommodation which would permit continued existence of high numbers would undermine all that has been accomplished, for the longer the retreat is delayed, the more permanent the environmental transformation would be. The budworm does not visit extinction on other species. At sustained high numbers, we inevitably do. And with nuclear war, we could succeed beyond our wildest dreams, perhaps even achieving a regression to a primary stage of succession—but of course the communities our activities might have revitalized would be no more.

The persistence of huge populations is something that may be facilitated by the good works of the environmentalist, augmented by the application of biological technology. Indeed, perhaps the ultimate in biotechnological fixes would be the introduction of chloroplasts into the human epidermis (a prospect not so far-fetched as it might seem, given the advances in genetic engineering and the realization that chloroplasts, and perhaps other organelles as well, may have originated as independent organisms that colonized the cells of others).[8] This would free us from the tyranny of the green plant once and for all, thereby removing almost all limits to our global alterations. The use of biology seems always to lead to the abuse of the biological. But if we were to be informed solely by the ravings of our detached ecologist, then we could be forced to conclude that the major enemies of earthly life are the environmentalists who seek a truce, while the James Watts with their acceptance of apocalypse represent the global budworm in its purest form. Given this discovery of purpose, an able philosopher might well manage to give voice to a "budworm ethic," in full confidence that he has the authority of ecology to vouch for the naturalness of his venture. Clearly, environmental destruction is the proper and natural thing to do. The philosopher referred to earlier concluded that "the person who learns of the dynamic homeostasis of an undisturbed ecosystem, and, along with this ecological knowledge, feels an obligation not to harm that system, is aware of a moral obligation."[9] If that is so, surely a person who learns of the creative power of the budworm might also feel a moral obligation to destroy. Apparently it is a risky business, seeking advice from nature. The oracle changes with the questioner.

The Social Construction of Nature

In the preceding, we have noted three forms of belief about the action proper to human beings, all apparently justified by the insights of ecology. We can live "in harmony" with nature, which to some is clearly the "natural" thing to do; we can expand our domain by direct competition with other species, which certainly seems (at least since Darwin) a "natural" enough thing to do; or we can endorse the over-exploitation of nature in certain knowledge that through our destruction we are doing nature's work, just as we were "naturally" meant to do. Proponents of the first two possibilities would no doubt be

8. These possibilities are discussed by Lewis Thomas, *Lives of a Cell* (New York, Bantam, 1974), and by D. Reanny, "Extrachromasomal Elements as Possible Agents of Adaptation and Development," *Bacteriological Review* 40 (1976): 552-590.

9. Marietta, p. 205.

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united in rejecting the third, if in nothing else. But the point is not that the "budworm" scenario deserves serious consideration, but rather that nature justifies nothing, or anything. Ecology is the official voice on natural matters, an institutional shaman that can be induced to pronounce *natural* anything we wish to espouse. Ecology is, in this sense, simply being used as a blunt instrument to help implement particular life-styles or social goals. The "global budworm" story illustrates the possibility of justifying almost anything through reference to ecology and nature, and emphasizes again the dangers of assuming there to be a single human nature that the oracle—in this case natural science—can reveal to us.

I doubt that any ecologist would be comfortable with the accounts I have given above, but as should be clear by now, science is not really the issue here. What matters is not what ecology *is*, but how it functions, how it is perceived and used. In that sense, what ecologists do or think they do is irrelevant. Given the role that the natural has played in most societies, it is not surprising that differing messages should be attributed to ecology. Reference to the natural is, as Mary Douglas has convincingly argued, a means employed in all societies to persuade others to one's point of view. She details instances in which environmental ills are attributed to misbehavior on the part of some society members, and shows that by referring to the possible consequences of "unnatural" behavior a society is able to coerce its miscreants into conformity.

> Pollution ideas, however they arise, are the necessary support for a social system. How else can people induce each other to cooperate and behave if they cannot threaten with time, money, God and nature? These moral imperatives arise from social intercourse. They draw on a view of the environment to support a social order.[10]

We prefer to believe that our society functions more "objectively" than did former ones, and that our study of the world is free of the superstitious distortions that led the primitive astray. But even if one is willing to admit some measure of objectivity to the scientific approach to knowledge, one must nevertheless take account of the way that knowledge is adopted by society. Mary Douglas claims that while we may believe that science is discovering objective truths about physical nature, "the human society invests these findings with social meaning and constructs a systematic time-tabled view of the way that human behaviour and physical nature interact."[11] At the moment there appears to be disagreement about the meaning that may be invested in the findings of ecology. And that conflict poses a potential danger to society as a whole, for without consensus, meaning may be held in abeyance. We begin to differ in what we regard as natural and even in what constitutes an environment. But if we "recognise each environment as a mask and support for a certain kind of society,"[12] then it is apparent that the different ecologies reveal different forms of society struggling for supremacy.

At the outset, I indicated my desire to draw attention to the ideas concisely phrased by Marshall Sahlins in *The Use and Abuse of Biology*. The example cited in the interim constitutes a simple if extreme instance of the varying uses to which ideas may be put, and of the pressures to find in one's explorations that which will reinforce certain beliefs and societal ideals. Ecology provides a convenient example of how theory is used to interpret nature, and the nature so devised used to justify the assumptions that the theory represents. As Sahlins observes, "we seem unable to escape from this perpetual movement, back and forth between the culturalization of nature and the naturalization of culture. It frustrates our understanding at once of society and of the organic world."[13] It also constitutes a continuing threat to attempts at developing an environmental or ecological ethic, since the basis upon which this will rest is likely to be social rather than "natural." Indeed, we might wonder whether the impulse to enunciate such an ethic could even arise in a society which did not already have an understanding of environment as a collection of individual particles against which one stands and to which one must relate. If each environment is "a mask and support for a certain kind of society," then perhaps the environment we perceive and discuss reveals our essential bias in viewing the world.

The oscillation which Sahlins describes may be inevitable, but perhaps we can hope that some of our more obvious excesses could be avoided if we were at least aware of our impulse toward a social construction of nature. Moreover, Berger and Luckmann warn that "in the dialectic between nature and the socially constructed world the human organism itself is transformed. In this same dialectic man produces reality and thereby produces himself."[14] In defining nature, we simultaneously define ourselves, and in seeking a single definition, we constrain ourselves to a narrow definition of humanity. Environmentalism is, in part, an exercise in self revelation.

It is relatively easy to accept that certain individuals might project their own misunderstandings upon nature, and also to believe that this tendency can be corrected by a large dose of "the facts." But it is harder to accept that our own reality is partly tailored by our will to discover, and that even the questions asked are selected for their likelihood of producing acceptable answers. The first step in achieving a new social order is, apparently, to construct a new nature that will justify, even demand, its implementation. The trio of "ecologies" sketched above could support alternatively compliant behavior in an expanded community, dominant behavior as befits the pinnacle of competitive evolution, or destructive behavior suited to the embodiment of the environmental crisis. Whether we adopt one of these or some other version of ecology, the nature revealed is ourselves in disguise. □

10. Mary Douglas, "Environments at Risk," *in* J. Benthall (ed.), *Ecology: The Shaping Enquiry* (London, Longman, 1972), p. 140.

11. Ibid, p. 140.

12. Ibid, p. 144.

13. Marshall Sahlins, *The Use and Abuse of Biology* (London, Tavistock, 1977), p. 105.

14. Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (New York, Anchor Books, 1967), p. 183.

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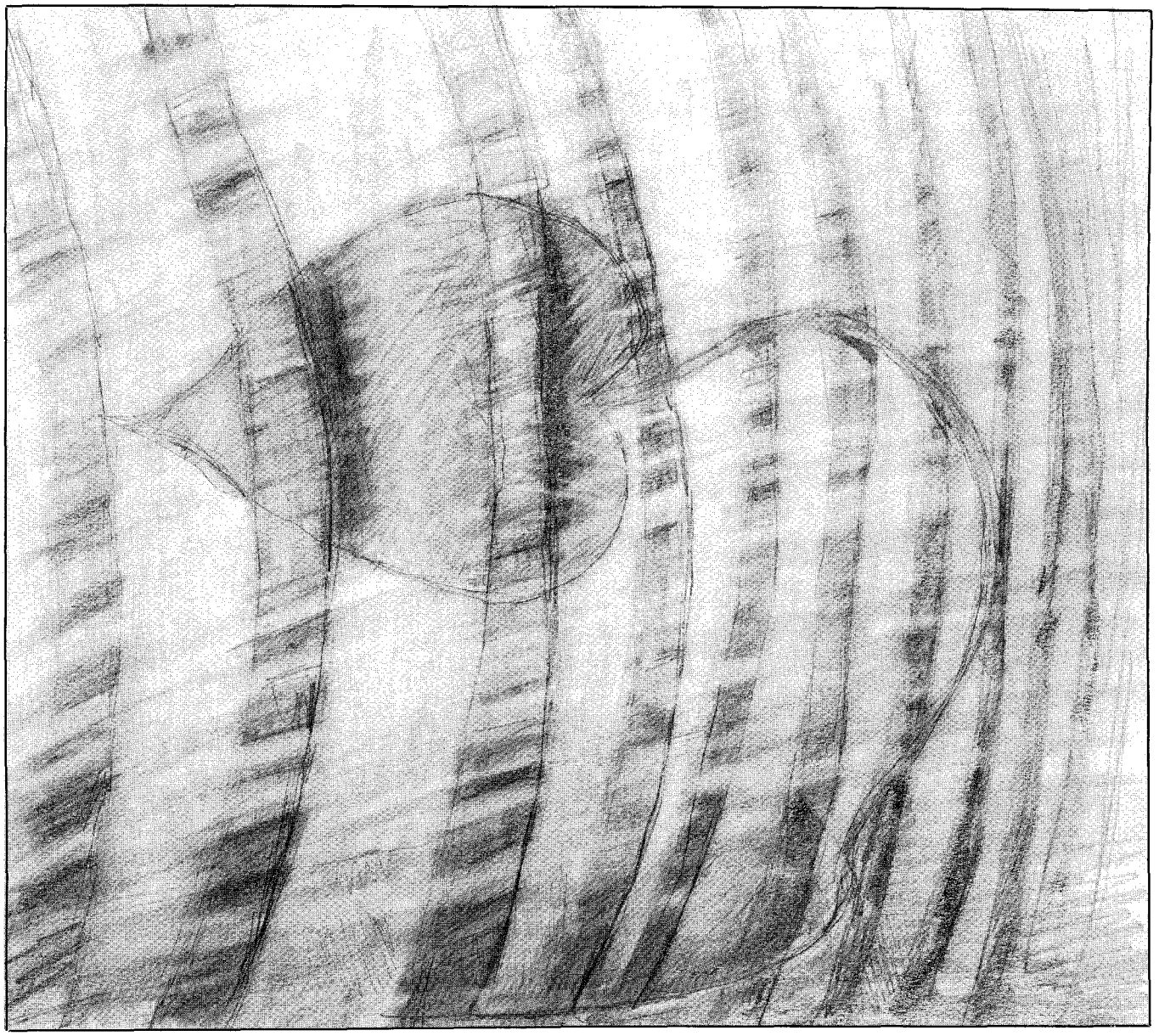

GHINDI

KAREN SNOW

Sometimes when I glimpse on the evening telecast a group of Arabs, suave and urbane in their recently acquired oil-millions, I wonder if one of them could be Ghindi. Probably not. Most likely, the introverted engineering student I knew briefly one winter at the university nearly forty years ago has remained the kind of man who would not seek publicity; who would, in fact, go to some lengths to avoid it.

The November I met Ghindi had begun as one of the hardest Novembers I had ever known, and I greatly feared that the freezing rains and blizzards and harsh winds and slush augured an almost unbearable winter. What I saw in the weather was, of course, a reflection of my current plight. A scholarship student from a hometown teachers college, I found myself flanked by whizzes from Harvard, Yale, Columbia, Dartmouth, and Radcliffe and Bennington. There was even one man from Cambridge in England, and two from India. In the seminar, where I encountered for the first time Eliot, Auden, Pound and Yeats, my classmates were linking these contemporary poets and their poems, with an ardent intimacy, into a network of other names, other ideas that were mostly foreign to me, like Donne and Blake and Dante and Kant and Existentialism and Dadaism. Within the tapestry of flashing needles and brilliantly-colored

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floss, I was the plodding darning needle dragging a thick gray thread across gaping holes.

Growing brittle from insomnia and anorexia, I'd try to soothe myself with the reminder that I had climbed to this pinnacle, not so much to earn a graduate degree as to—number one—produce a novel under the supervision of a renowned professor of creative writing, and—number two—to find a husband. My notebook already crammed with random chapters of an autobiographical novel, the first goal seemed not too unattainable. And with men in the graduate division of this university outnumbering women, ten to one, the second also seemed fairly feasible. With great force, my thoughts towards midnight would burst from the maze of footnotes to "The Waste Land" and start cavorting with goal number two. Probably among the hundreds of men I passed daily on this cosmopolitan campus, I had already seen the one who would become my husband. Very likely he was one of the many GIs, in his late twenties or early thirties, attractively matured by military service, wearing a rumpled uniform shorn of insignia. Perhaps he was the Canadian three rows behind me in Chaucer class, who asked humorous questions in that confident voice. Perhaps the blond man with the rugged profile whose ardent blue eyes were always on me when I turned to the left. Perhaps the broad-shouldered one in trench coat who dashed late into the lecture hall.

Failing to find the loving husband, failing to write the smashing novel, I could see myself, clearly, rear view—like a woman in a Munch painting—entering the big iron gate of the insane asylum, could hear the lock clank behind me.

"Rule number one," said the silver-haired professor, his handsome face crinkled with a smile, "—and I tell this to every one of my students at the initial conference: No self-pity." Here, enthroned in a big leather chair, was the renowned Professor Royce, who was to tutor me in creative writing.

Jolted, but no more jolted than I'd been at almost every other aspect of the university process, I smiled my little anything-you-wish smile, and, fat notebook clutched in thin hands to thin breast, I departed for my apartment, where, alone in my room (my roommates were always out in the afternoon) I set to work re-writing chapter one. After a three-hour tussle with words like *ephemeral, exquisite, gossamer, emerald, cerise, ivory, mellifluous,* I had, I hoped, stitched an objective correlative of blossoming pear tree and birdsong, like a flounce, onto my former flat account of freight train and papermill and soot.

As I wrote, an image kept intruding. A horrid image. And that night the image invaded my insomnia. And the next night it returned, and the next, and I feared I might be starting to go crazy already.

The image was of my father cutting off a man's head. The head was not in sight, but the headless body of a heavyset man in a plaid suit stood erect in front of my father, who held the bloody butcher knife in his hand. At my father's side, my mother was holding up our big white potato bowl to the neck stump to catch the blood. Actually this was a re-surfacing of a nightmare I had had when I was five years old, about a month before starting kindergarten. It had shaken me so badly that for quite a few weeks—or was it months?—I could not swallow solid food, could only sip milk and Ovaltine. The beheaded man, I had known upon waking from the dream when I was five, was Major Hoople of the funny papers. I had recognized him from the portly build and plaid suit. Why Major Hoople? Seventeen years later, I had still not solved the riddle.

Day after day, night after night, the beheading scene returned to sicken me, and with increasingly strenuous efforts I stitched the flounces and ruffles of cheer onto the little gray chapters of my sob story.

"I feel as though I'm reading the *Reader's Digest*," said Professor Royce, peering at me clownishly through his thick bifocals. Another time he said, with that twinkling smile, "The close of this chapter reminds me of a Hallmark greeting card."

"Oh," I said, smiling my doll-smile, feeling vaguely that I had received some kind of chivalrous compliment.

As if the image of the beheading were not harrowing enough, a second image began to torment me: a manhole. On the way to classes, I had to cross a street that contained a manhole, and the circle of warm, rising steam and the rim of dirty slush turned me so weak that I feared some days my sinking legs would not convey me to the classroom. "Up pops the devil!" I'd seem to hear. It was my Uncle Milo's voice. He was my mother's brother, and sometimes in winter he lived down under the streets in the sewers. Lots of bums stayed down there, he told her. It was warm. "Up pops the devil!" he used to announce when he opened our back door. You'd smell him the instant he entered the kitchen; and long after he'd left, his stink clung to the walls and the furniture. He was a big, greasy brownish man, looking bigger when he departed than when he arrived because all the pockets of his jacket and tattered overcoat were packed with cans of sardines and soups, boiled eggs, sandwiches, cigar clippings, and if a cold wind were blowing, he'd have a layer of newspapers tucked inside his vest.

"Who's that colored guy that comes to your house?" More than one neighbor child had asked me that question. Solemnly, as my mother had drilled into me, I'd reply, "That's my Uncle Milo. He's a ha-bit-u-al drunkard." I pronounced the long label reverently and would repeat it with the same reverence when the child later asked me to tell his pal. At that early age, I must have shared my mother's pride in lavishing hospitality upon this needy soul. It was our religious duty, our privilege, comparable to the good deeds our churchly neighbors did for the sick and the poor and the shut-ins.

"I made Otto promise before I married him," my mother would boast, "that Milo would always be welcome in my home."

"—so long as he's not drinking," my father would remind her.

Shortly after my dad left the house for work, Milo

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would appear, and shortly before my dad was due to return for supper, Milo would disappear. He'd sprawl most of the day on the davenport, his snore and his stink filling the house, while below in the cellar, Mamma scrubbed his strundty underwear and reeking socks. Later, seated in the kitchen, darning and patching his clothes, she'd wait for him to wake up and drink the coffee and gobble the eggs she'd so blissfully fry for him along with beans and sauerkraut and side-pork. Together at the kitchen table, they looked nothing like brother and sister—he, swarthy and strapping, with wide fleshy nose and quilted lips; she, sallow and skinny, with boney beak and fleshless lips; his voice grunty; her voice creaky. "Shhh! Little pitchers!"

Milo dominated our household when he was absent, just as he dominated it when he was there, especially in winter. If he hadn't shown up for a few days, Mamma would keep walking to the windows and, poorly concealed behind the curtains, she'd glance up the street and down the street, mumbling that she was worried he'd been knifed by a dope fiend in a flop house, or that he'd hopped a freight train and been locked inside a boxcar and lay starving and freezing somewhere in Ohio or Kansas or some other faraway place; or that in jumping off the train, he'd broken his neck or his leg and was lying somewhere beside the track, dying in agony. At Christmas, if he didn't show up, she'd bleat that she couldn't enjoy her gifts because she was so worried about Milo. She hoped he was in jail, where he'd at least have a roof over his head and some food in his belly. Or maybe at the Salvation Army. Anything but a boxcar. "Milo! Oh, Milo! Where are you?" she'd howl like a coyote throughout the winter holidays. That was our Christmas carol.

"Promise me you'll never snub Milo," Mamma would say, and I'd brace myself for her sing-songy sermon. "When you grow up and get married, wherever you're living, even if it's among the swells, '*specially* if it's among the swells, and if Milo comes to your door, don't you dare turn him away. If you do, you'll be one sorry lady."

"No self-pity," I'd hear that regal voice croon. And hunched over my notebook, I'd diligently festoon another batch of facts with baubles and tinsel.

"You can't have a passive protagonist," Professor Royce declared, his gnarled fingers gently patting my chapter five, which lay on the desk between us.

Passive protagonist. The phrase, like a speeding truck, veered off into my swampy mentality.

"It doesn't work," he continued, steadily patting the red-penciled paragraph at the top of the page. "The reader wants action. That's what a novel is all about: *action*."

The truckish phrase spun its wheels. "But it happens in real life," I offered. "I mean, some people are passive."

He threw back his head in mock laughter. "But a novel isn't a report of life. Art isn't life. That's the whole point of this course, is it not?"

"Mmmmm," said my stalled voice.

The genial old face, cocked to one side, leaned closer, and the magnified brown eyes scrutinized me. "Every week when I wade through your manuscript," he whispered, "I find myself asking: What makes this student think she's a writer?"

Another jolt. I shrugged. "My teachers—several of my teachers—" I stammered, "in undergrad and even way back in junior high school—they all encouraged me to write."

The old face sagged a moment before filling up anew with grandfatherly indulgence. "Have you ever thought of trying Hollywood?"

Hollywood. For days, the name waltzed around in my head. The old gentleman seemed not at all dazzled with my literary talent. Was he saying: *Little Lady, you're too pretty for words?*

Maybe it was that whirling word, *Hollywood*, that snatched up a pair of waiting words: *Arcade, boutiques*. My roommates were always chattering about the arcade lined with chic little shops they called *boutiques*. Badly needing a detour around the manhole, I set out one day in the other direction, into the shopping center, where I located at eye level on the corner of the bookstore a plaque that said *Bonnard's Arcade*. A left turn brought me abruptly into a fairyland of florist shop and art gallery—then a jeweler and stationer and confectioner and furrier and dress shop and haberdashery and lingerie shop. The lingerie shop. Ah.

Day after day, I was drawn back to the artful spills of silk on the midnight blue velvet platform. Here, the creamy puddle of a satin slip. There, the peachy slither of a nightgown around a tall vase of maple leaves. Blooming in the far corner, the pale blue froth of a lace panty. By the end of the week, my Sears underwear with its ridgy seams and lumpy elastic and blatant lace had become a hair shirt. A few days later, across the window at a dashing diagonal, in swirly blue script, a SALE sign beckoned me. All morning in classes, the word, like a saucy signature tilted upwards to the right, lilted through my thoughts more movingly than the apostrophe of any poem.

On my way back to the apartment, I entered the shop and, enfolded in an aroma I could only describe to myself as "a boudoir fragrance," I bought a pale blue dream of a petite slip, with an ever-so-dainty trim of ecru lace. The following day, I returned for the matching panties.

Amulets. Charms. Gazing at them in my drawer, touching them, was a lozenge to a sore throat.

The SALE continued to draw me like a drug. I was enticed by—but resisted—a blue padded bra, and settled instead for a regular AA cup. After all, I was, in a way, purchasing my trousseau. No cheaters for the husband who would one day stroke these filmy garments and tenderly peel them from my flesh. Lying down for a nap in the three pale blue wisps, I could see him ever so vividly: a professor, my senior by fifteen or twenty years. Around forty. If not an Apollo, then at least *very interesting looking*. Sad. Lonely. Recently widowed. Gallantly, for several years, he had endured his wife's slow disintegration from cancer. If once she had been beautiful, that had been long ago. In recent years, all he had ever come home

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to was the rotting hag. Now, into the gap she had left, would slip this twenty-two-year-old nymph, this somewhat sickly girl, whose illness, treated with daily doses of his affection, would turn into buoyant health and beauty, whose cultural deprivation, under his patient tutelage, would be transformed into a brave literary gift. How remarkably this fulfilled young wife would rejuvenate the middle age husband.

In the corner drug store, I bought a packet of mascara and a bottle of lily-of-the-valley cologne. Bolstered with these pretties, I was able not only to stoke the husband-fantasy but to frill one more chapter of railroad and cinders and washing machine with a windowbox of crimson geraniums and a trellis of blue morning glories.

In the arcade, another sale, another fix: a headscarf of violet paisley challis shot through with splashes of chartreuse. Gazing back at me from the oval mirror in the boutique, with mascara-embellished eyes like a pair of lavender clematis blossoms, the pale face swathed in the violet aura could have been, I thought, the face of an alluring new Hollywood starlet.

It was at that moment, as I was emerging from that boutique, wearing that headscarf, Ghindi told me later, that he was first drawn to me. Reeling back my memory to that spot, that moment, I could recall no person other than myself, which may hint at the degree to which my strength was being siphoned into the masquerade.

Seeing me decorated with cosmetics and romantic-looking headgear, each of my roommates invited me on a double date. Which would I prefer? a dance at the fraternity? or an Italian film? My lament of a sore throat and an upcoming blue book in Chaucer was just the beginning, I knew, of a chain of alibis I'd be inventing for these sociable girls; and in my habit of previsualizing the events of my life, I saw vividly the shock and disgust on their faces when my petrified postures would betray that this was my very first date with a man.

Evenings in the library study hall, I bypassed the tables where my classmates studied, avoided the friendly glances of Rugged Profile and Dashing Trenchcoat and Humorous Canadian. It wasn't that I didn't like these men. Their shaggy good looks aroused my cuddling instinct, but when one of them came close to me in the classroom or in the hall, a gagging reflex would climb into my throat, and I could hardly wait to dart away. It was my dread of being involved in a conversation, I told myself. I simply needed more time for patching up my ignorance. And I sat at the table of Semitic-looking men. Whether they were from Israel or Islam or Iran or Egypt or where, I had not the slightest notion. With their raven black hair and hooded dark eyes and prominent high-bridged noses, they all looked similar to me. All were attired in crisply pressed suits, shiny ties, and vests, like prosperous business men, and the chairs beside them were mounded with thick camel-hair or wool chinchilla overcoats and fancy wool mufflers and fur-lined leather gloves, and on the floor beside each chair was an expensive-looking briefcase. Their very formal, foreign look made them seem conveniently remote.

The voilet scarf crumpled on my book that Friday evening, I was gazing at it, as at a large flower that might lure my swarming thoughts. If, after a while, one word would smell the nectar, it could dance the others into an orderly hive of phrases and sentences and paragraphs for my essay on "The Hollow Men." . . . No luck. Maybe by starting with an action, simple and specific and familiar, like writing a letter to my mother, I could inch a path through the muddle. *Don't expect me home for Thanksgiving,* I scratched in my notebook. *I'm working on two term papers and studying for an exam*— As I wrote, I let myself believe that never again would I have to ride that hundred miles on that train, never again would I enter that clapboard box. *I may not make it home for Christmas, either,* I continued. I watched myself disappear behind the iron gate of the insane asylum, heard the clank of the lock . . . watched the final scene of sleeping pills and suicide.

After a while, exhausted by fantasies, too muzzy to study, I tied the scarf over my hair and packed up my books. Across the table from me, one of the dark men—the smaller and slighter one of the group—hastily packed up his books, too, and walked out of the study hall behind me. In the lobby, he introduced himself as "Ghindi" and added, "Would like you come to party with me?"

Flung too far off guard to produce one of my bland alibis, I blurted, "I'm too shy to go to parties."

He smiled, a fox-like smile, and in a low, muffled voice, he was saying, "I shy for party, also. Would come to my room, please?"

Flung a second time, I heard my stunned voice answer, "Well—all right."

And he was asking, "Your name, please?" and was pushing open the heavy door and we were stepping together into the blustery November night.

He apologized, haltingly, for his English, and added something that sounded like when he'd studied English as a schoolboy in Kuwait he'd never dreamed he'd be speaking it one day in America.

It's still not too late to excuse yourself, some inner voice informed me; another voice quickly added: *That would be rude. How would you face him—or evade him—from now on in the library?*

"You study—what, Willo?" he inquired.

I told him creative writing.

"To become teacher?"

"To become a writer—a novelist."

"Novelist?" He said it with a groaning sound that elided into "I do not understand Americans. No."

A minimal mannerliness started perking inside my skull, and I inquired about his field of study.

"Engineering," he said disdainfully.

I asked, mundanely, how he liked this weather.

"I hate weather, hate food, hate the engineering." In his soft buzzing voice, it sounded like the refrain of an ancient ballad.

Ghindi's room appeared to be a suite of rooms on the second floor of a big Victorian house. It smelled of sandal-

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wood, or something like sandalwood, and oranges. And it was very warm and very clean. Two gleaming white radiators ticked busily. On the polished oak floor were three bright Persian rugs, mostly reddish. *What am I doing here?* I asked myself. Ghindi was hanging our coats in a closet and motioning me to sit in one of a pair of high-backed upholstered chairs, also of a ruddy hue, and he seated himself on the other. He asked me something that sounded like "glass orange juice?" and I said no thank you.

"You like music, Willo?" he inquired, gesturing towards the phonograph between us.

"Oh, yes!" I said, eager for a respite from conversation.

"Chopin?" he asked.

I uttered a breathy "Yes." A lie. Although I knew, vaguely, that Chopin had died young of tuberculosis, I knew nothing about his music, nor about any classical music. In fact, I had long suspected that along with my many other deficiencies, I must be tone-deaf.

When he rose to select the record from the cabinet, I noticed how very thin he was, like me. *Ectomorph.* That was a word I had acquired recently. Ectomorphs suffered terribly from the things the endomorphs and mesomorphs enjoyed, like parties and sports. He placed the record on the turntable, and as the piano music trilled and swooped, I instructed myself to unclasp my arms from my ribs and let my hands rest loosely in my lap and to elevate my gaze to the molding around the high white ceiling. As the music arched and plummeted and arched again, I made my gaze follow the simple leaf pattern of the molding. When, after what seemed like a long time, the music trickled to a standstill, I made myself turn to my host with what I hoped was an enchanted face. "Marvelous!" I said, breathily, the way I imagined a starlet might perform.

"Mar-vel-ous." He repeated it, carefully, three times, like a pupil mastering a new word, and with that little fox-smile, as if we had successfully passed the music test, he stood and motioned to the wall of photographs to the left. "I like to meet my family, Willo," he said, and obligingly I rose and stood beside him while he introduced me to his mother: a serene round face framed in smooth black hair and long earrings. His father: narrow-faced, serious-looking, like Ghindi. His sister: shoulder-length black hair, necklace, bare arms, bracelets . . . and a second sister, and a third sister, and "Jinna, my betrozed" it sounded like, and all five of the women blurred in my mind to a composite of heavy black hair and big dark eyes in serene faces. . . . and jewels. "My little niece . . . my little nephew . . . the baby" . . . all three of them chubby and content in adult laps. "Look, Willo. Know you this face?" he asked, and before I could answer, he assured me the tall good-looking young man in white shorts was "Cousin Clovis—in library." And this other young man, chubbier than Clovis, also in white shorts, was "Cousin Abu—in library also." I glanced at the family members again, in their background of ballustrades, palm trees, lounge chairs, green grass. Not a burnoose nor a veil nor a tent nor a camel in sight. Had I come across these pictures in a magazine, I'd have taken them for a wealthy New York Jewish family vacationing in Palm Springs.

Clovis and Abu, Ghindi explained, were going later this evening to a "party with nurses." The way he hissed the word made me thankful I was not a nurse, and doubly thankful we had not gone to that party.

"Mozart you like, Willo?" Ghindi asked.

I uttered another rapt yes, with a touch of sincerity this time; I was so relieved that the evening was passing decently. Mozart lent himself as well to the leaf-pattern on the molding as Chopin, and while the fringe of my attention was fluttered a little by the pleasing melody, the center of my attention was coiled expertly around the melancholy recollection that Mozart, like Chopin, had died young.

After the Mozart, Ghindi asked me if I was ready to leave. I tried not to leap too eagerly from the chair, and he helped me into my coat, and watching me tie the voilet scarf over my hair, he said, "Is nice."

He walked me home—actually less than two blocks—our steps squeaking in the newfallen snow, and at my door, he murmured a phrase that approximated "the pleasure of your company," and asked me if I'd care to do the same "Friday evening next at eight, library." I said yes, and he pressed my hand lightly, and with a slight bow, he turned and departed.

Friday afternoon next I showered and shampooed and rolled my long hair in curlers. At seven-thirty I brushed the rolls into a flaxen fluff and scented myself with the lily-of-the-valley cologne and put on the pale blue slip and bra and panties and my best cardigan and skirt and a little pink lipstick and lots of mascara. With a *thanks but no thanks* to my roommates, I announced—not too smugly, I hoped—my forthcoming date with Ghindi.

As I seated myself at the long table in the library, I sensed a ripple of attention pass through Ghindi's cousins and countrymen, and while I was settling my coat and books and papers, Ghindi appeared and seated himself beside me. It was impossible to study. His spicy after-shave or cologne, or whatever it was, nudged my sweet cologne. His slender olive-colored hand, napped with fine black hairs, drew my gaze from the opened Chaucer book; his crisp white cuff absorbed my gaze, the ruby stud, the dark tweedy sleeve. With a great deal of racket, the tall Clovis pushed back his chair and sauntered our way and squeezed Ghindi's nape before strolling out to the stacks. On the table in front of me, "The Nonnes Preestes Tale" squirmed into a script, apparently the preface for the current scene, that read: *Hey, Ghindi! Cut out this damned moping. So this IS a lousy country. No need to be miserable. Get a girl. A lay. A nurse. Or that blonde across table in the library. She's asking for it.*

Chubby cousin Abu pushed back his chair raucously, and on his leisurely way to the stacks, he patted Ghindi on the head.

The big clock over the door said three minutes before eight.

"Now, Willo?" Ghindi whispered.

The scent of sandalwood and oranges (or whatever it was) seemed so civilized, I thought, compared with the ham-

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burger and hot dog odor that permeated the apartment I shared with my American roommates.

I said no thank you again to Ghindi's offer of a glass of orange juice, which he fetched for himself from a small refrigerator that had fooled me into thinking it was a piece of brown leather luggage. I seated myself again in the assigned chair, and he placed another Chopin on the turntable, and I set to work gazing dreamily at the leaf-molding. When I grew bored with the molding, I lowered my eyes to the wallpaper, which was a fairly pleasing vertical pattern of maroonish ivy, and when I grew bored with the wallpaper, I turned to the gallery of family-faces. The music dwindled delicately into silence, and again I uttered my special "Marvelous!"

Ghindi repeated it after me, three times, with a light, feathery laugh, as if the word were our secret little witticism, and I noticed that his eyes were not dark brown, like Abu's and Clovis's, but hazel. In a stilted manner, as if reciting a rehearsed speech, he told me a joke about a little boy who hated summer camp, and when the counselor asked him if he were homesick, the boy replied, "I'm not *home*sick. I'm *here*sick."

I laughed—a fairly genuine little giggle, and in a pampering tone, I said, "Poor Ghindi is *here*sick."

He nodded. "Poor Ghindi is heresick," he repeated, in the same tone, and I felt like an actress who had delivered a line, charmingly, for a film director. Which was quite an apt comparison, considering what followed.

"Sit you for the camera, please, Willo?" Ghindi asked.

Flattered, I said yes, and he disappeared into a closet and emerged with a camera and a pair of big spotlights with green metal hoods—and a honey-colored teddy bear. "—for nephew Bashar, gift," he explained.

He handed me the pert little teddy, which I hugged, while he photographed me from various angles. "Is nice, Willo!" he said in that soft, buzzing tone. "Oh! Is nice!" He stepped into the closet again and returned with a big golden-haired doll. "For niece." Very sincerely, with the raw covetousness of the poor child for the toys of the rich children, I took this sweetheart into my arms and tenderly arranged the gauzy green dress and adjusted the buckle of the darling white shoe, all to the accompaniment of clicks and blandishments.

"Now," he said, "two-tree with me. No?"

"Yes," I said.

"Yes?" he said, skeptically.

"Yes," I assured him.

From the closet he brought out what looked like a bundle of canes. "This way, please," he said, walking towards a closed door. With his hand on the knob, he turned to me. "Don't afraid you. Will be nothing to embarrass, after."

I followed him into the bedroom and sat, as he instructed me, on the edge of the silky wine-colored bedspread. With some pressure from his thumbs, the bundle of canes clacked into a tripod, upon which he perched the camera, and after considerable fussing with the spotlights, he seated himself beside me.

This is for the cousins, I thought. *Proof.* And I congratulated myself for having worn the blue undies.

"Don't afraid you," he repeated, and he laid his cheek lightly to mine. *Pardon me,* I flashed to Jinna on the wall in the next room, as his arm crept around my back and his hand lightly gripped my upper arm. The shutter clicked, and Ghindi sprang up and fussed some more with the camera and swiveled the spotlights this way and that. Immobilized in a mesh of our mingled scents, I remained on the bed, awaiting further instructions.

"Please? You?" he faltered. His eyes on my cardigan, he fingered his own crisp white collar. "—loose two-tree hook of jumper?"

Obediently, I unbuttoned three top buttons. *Clovis and Abu,* I joked, *you'd better appreciate this one.*

Ghindi removed his coat and swished off his tie and undid the top few buttons of his white shirt and the black fur fumed forth live as a mink. The hazel eyes met mine, and before he could ask, I'd slipped off the cardigan. "Ah!" he said, and posed, as before, cheek to cheek, with his arm around me, and the shutter clicked. The dark hand grew warm on my pale arm and his cheek burned my cheek, and I suppressed a gagging reflex. *—like faking rapture over the music,* I coached myself.

He sprang to his feet and plunged into the closet and came towards me bearing a light brown cloud in his arms—his kimono—which he draped around my shoulders. It felt so soft and weightless it must be cashmere, I thought, and to the buzz of "Is nice, Willo!" the camera recorded a medley of solo poses.

Enveloped in our coupled scent, I kept saying *Pardon me* to Jinna, but soon the apology began to feel superfluous. The very wallpaper seemed abloom with the multiple faces of Ghindi's dark guardian-goddesses.

It was clear and cold and starlit when we left his place, and the snow chirped under our boots. I asked him if the pictures would be developed in a drug store, which he didn't seem to understand. I tried again. "The photographs—the negatives—in a pharmacy?"

"No. No!" he said. "In lab. Myself. Don't afraid you."

When we reached my place, he invited me, in his formal way, to spend Friday evening next in his room, and I said yes. He took my hand, as before, and I braced myself for more, but he only pressed the hand quickly and let me go, unencumbered by an embrace or a kiss.

It was past two in the morning when my excitement wound down enough to permit me a few short segments of shallow sleep, and it was well past dawn when, waking slowly from a deep dreaming sleep, I realized Major Hoople had just clicked into Milo.

Of course. By the age of five, how desperately (and how guiltily!) I must have wished my frail father would turn dragon-slayer and banish the monster-Milo from our home . . . must have wished that my mother would assist her husband in this eviction. And perhaps it was not the head I wished cut off so much as another knob—that lump in the front of his pants—that he pushed against my cheek one day when Mamma was below in the cellar doing his laundry. Grasping me by the hair so I couldn't

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turn away, he whispered, "Hey! Lookit this. What's this? Huh?" . . . Later, when I told Mamma, she said, "I don't like little girls that tell stories." When it happened again, and I told her again, she said, "Stop sittin around with yer legs up. Yer a big girl now."

The third Friday, our eight o'clock exit took on a chummy flair. As we were leaving the table, Ghindi placed his arm around my shoulders, and all the way down the long aisle, I imagined the smiles, the winks, the good-natured guffaws of Clovis and Abu and their fellow countrymen, as well as the quizzical glances of my classmates. On the exit for the fourth date, when Ghindi placed his arm around my shoulders, I boldly slipped my arm around his waist. The entire study hall, I imagined, rumbled with applause.

Ah, the cunning of the ectomorph. Our dalliance reminded me of recess in third grade. All fall and winter, the teacher had been coaxing me, without success, to participate properly in the group games. One bleak day, finding me, as usual, blue with cold and shivering on the periphery of a boisterous game, she handed me a big rainbow-colored ball, light in weight, something like a beach ball, and told me to go over to the hedge with Betty—a fourth grader in a leg brace—and to bounce the ball back and forth to one another. Screened behind the shrubbery, Betty and I fumbled with the big bubble-like ball and giggled and moved just enough to bring a tint of pink to our cheeks by the time the whistle tweeted for dismissal. "Dash to the gymnasium," the teacher would call to me, "and put the ball away in the middle cupboard!"—an order which I managed to execute with athletic aplomb. Thus Betty and I passed "gym."

The Friday trysts—five in all—spanned two months, mid-November to mid-January. Then Ghindi and his cousins returned to Kuwait.

The final rendezvous was tense. Ghindi announced that it was a Mozart-something he was placing on the phonograph, and we seated ourselves, sedately, like strangers, in the upholstered chairs, and assumed our music-appreciation poses.

While he was turning over the record, I addressed his pharaoh-like profile. "I never did get your last name, Ghindi."

"Is not important," the averted face said. "I never get your last name, also."

Was I the stray cat he had unwisely taken in out of the cold and fed a few scraps? Or was I—according to the warnings from the worldly Abu and Clovis—the wily western tart who would, at the last moment, try to snare him with a show of lingerie and tears? *Don't afraid you,* I wanted to convey to him. *No for anything would I let this mascara turn to mud.* But that was just another one of those pretend-lines I was always supplying the starlet. The truth was that I didn't know how to cry. By the witchery of ridicule in my toddler years, my mother had rendered me permanently dry-eyed.

After the other side of the Mozart record, Ghindi presented me with a purse-size portfolio of photographs. I was pleased. He had made me look so pretty, not shiny-pretty, as I had anticipated, but softly-pretty, something akin to his sisters and Jinna and the niece and nephew. But not just like them. I was pastel—and misty. *Like white light, folded,* I thought, honored that an image of T.S. Eliot's had flown spontaneously into my very own experience. "I like these very much," I told him. "They're so light and so misty."

It was the paper, he explained, a special matte finish. "The spotlight, also."

Eleven portraits. I mentioned that he had not included himself in any of them, and he said, "I told you: nothing to embarrass, after."

I glanced around at the walls now stripped of his family photographs, and silently thanked the calm, dark women whose proxy-presence had kept my life so simple. I wanted to ask if he had shown my photos to anyone else, but I sensed that the inquiry would be in poor taste. I was certain that he had. By the same token, I refrained from asking if he would show any of the photos to anyone in Kuwait; I was certain he would not.

He walked me home, as before, and prosaically I wished him and his cousins a safe and pleasant voyage and thanked him for the portraits, and just as prosaically he thanked me for posing and wished me luck with my writing. —*Like white light, folded* kept fluttering towards my tongue and bumping into another phrase: *I'll never forget you.* . . until the two phrases locked together and lodged in my throat. Arrived at my steps, phrases like "Thanks for everything" and "Bye" and "So long" fizzed from my lips.

"'So long?'" he said, questioningly, as he took my hand.

Nearly strangling with stage fright, I translated: "So long—another way of saying 'good-bye.'"

"So long," he repeated. "So long." And he turned away, and I fled up my stairs.

I was relieved it was finished. I knew he was relieved, too. We had run out of material for our little pantomime.

One February morning when I entered the library, more people than usual were milling about the lobby. They were looking at something on tall folding screens placed all around the room. I peered between the broad shoulders of two men, and it was like looking into a mirror—a large frosty mirror. It was the stray-kitten self, mostly eyes, and nearly white fluffy hair, the neck and shoulders fragile within the caressing folds of the oversize kimono. *Second prize* stated the neatly lettered label below the portrait. In the bottom right corner, in small angular script, was the single name *Ghindi.* The silent *h* surprised me.

That afternoon, Professor Royce greeted me with a rollicking "Well! When are you leaving for Hollywood?"

I did not go to Hollywood. I hung on at the university for five years, grappling with the novel and earning a master's degree, and dating a few more men with cameras and kimonos. □

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BOYER RICKEL

TWO MOTHERS IN THE CLOISTERS

One eye half-covered by the lid, the other open to the world,
the cracked, five-hundred year-old Madonna,
a headless baby in her arms, smiled

while the other mother, gray
and gap-toothed, talked about her crazy son
to anyone who'd listen.

Her voice broke off, and I could see
the Madonna had no feet,
and the guide-ropes were covered in sky-blue velvet.
The living mother's eyes
never fell on objects, but searched the open spaces. . .

On dreams there's no consensus.
Half the day I walked around sick from a dream
as though I'd swallowed a toxic substance.
For centuries people thought of them as omens.
Now we're told we *are* what we create—
I *am* my loved one, her lace-trimmed water-colored skirt. . .

Forbearance. Not the Ancients' notion
of Fate, though I can feel it
in Oedipus' demeanor at the end
as he walks blinded out of Thebes,
or in the grim composure
of the fifteenth-century Madonna. As if to say,

Since we can't will the knowledge we need to live,
we must make,
and when the thing is done,
acknowledge its beauty and its brokenness:

I dreamed I carved up my mother with a hunting knife.

The mother with a mad son smiled past my face.

We must forgive what we create.

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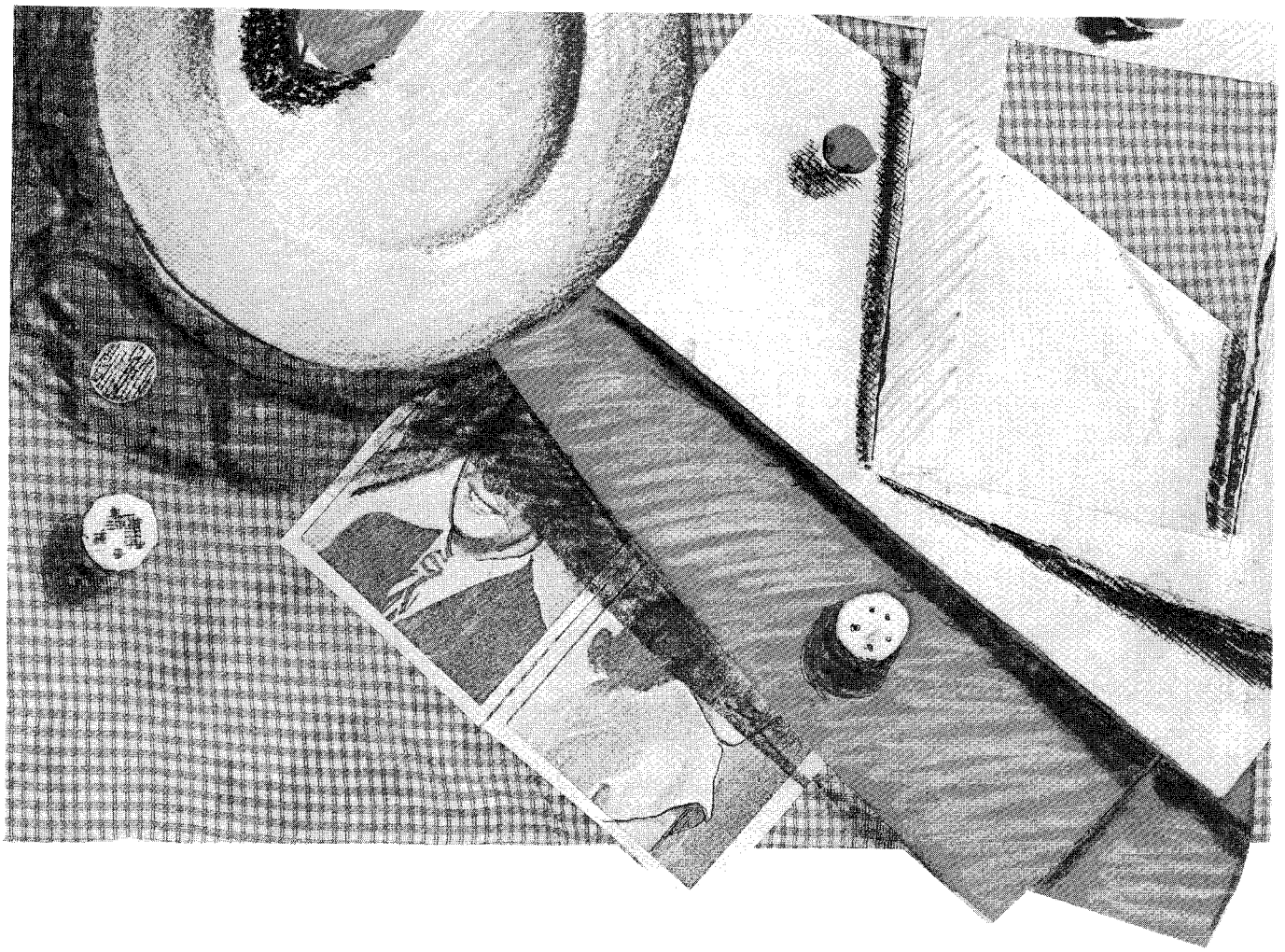

HAPPY FORTIETH, ED AND SHIRLEY

ANNETTE SANFORD

Ed and Shirley turned up again this morning, on the garage floor this time. Harry and I were backing out to go spend the day with his sister Benedict when I rememberd that I hadn't finished covering up the pansies.

"Wait a minute," I said, "The plant I left out is the nicest one in the batch, and it may be freezing by the time we come home."

Harry said, "Do you want me to do it?"

"I'll get it." I went back in the garage and that's when I spotted Ed and Shirley. I suppose they fell out of the overhead cabinet when I was bringing down the Christmas decorations. Or maybe all winter they've been stuck there under the washer, waiting to make themselves useful for once.

Anyway, the folder they're pasted into was just the right size to fill a gap in a soup box. I put the box on top of my plant and a flower pot on top of the box and got back in the car.

I told Harry what I'd done. "And I'm not going to feel guilty."

"Good," he said. "Don't."

"You never wanted me to throw them away before."

"You're not throwing them away now."

"They'll be ruined out in the weather all day."

Harry said. "They're only clutter anyway. Isn't that your theory?"

I admitted it was. Down with clutter: jars without lids, frying pans without handles, pictures of people nobody knows.

The first time Ed and Shirley showed up was New Year's Day, 1957. I spent all morning putting together a coconut cream pie and then I walked off to the corner with Harry to watch for the Knights of Columbus float his boss was riding and burned the whole thing up. When we came back, smoke met us at the front door. Inside the oven frizzles of coconut flared like Roman candles. We were still fanning the smell out when we sat down in the living room after lunch to look through a box of family mementos Benedict had brought over.

"This is the last of the stuff from Mama's house,"

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Benedict said and dumped in front of us a mixture of odds and ends spanning three generations: collar buttons and tintypes, engraved calling cards and dozens of prints from the box cameras of the 'thirties. There was a porcelain shaving dish with hard yellow soap cracked in the bottom and a stack of foxed Valentines so lacy and sweet I couldn't get enough of them.

What caught Harry's eye was a photographer's portfolio, gray and stiff-backed, with embossed scrolls twined around the edges. Glued inside were a couple of sepia-toned studio prints of a young man and woman.

Harry laughed. "Look at this guy's ears. I bet on a clear night he could pick up Chicago."

I was more interested in his peculiar taste in clothes. "Who are they?"

Harry didn't know. "Ask Ben."

Benedict didn't know either, but her guess was that they were a couple of the roomers who tracked in and out of their mother's house during the war years while Ben was in the WAACs and Harry and I were in Texas. "What does the inscription say?"

I read aloud the inky scrawl. "Love, Ed and Shirley."

Benedict went back to inspecting an infant version of herself as bare as an egg on a white fur rug. "Didn't Uncle Fox Warner have a son named Ed?"

Harry said, "He had a son named Fred who departed this vale of tears in 1920."

I remember Ben snickering. "In 1920, Lucille. Harry was told ahead of time that the question might come up and wrote the date inside his shirt cuff."

Harry said, "Every Cemetery Clean-Up Day until I was fourteen I ate my lunch on Fred Warner's tombstone."

Ed and Shirley, I observed, were a jazzy looking couple out of the 'forties. The Golden Era. I felt my Frank Sinatra goosebumps rising on my spine. "Look at Shirley's pompadour. Look at all that dark lipstick."

In 1944 I looked something like Shirley myself, except that I was sixteen and she was more like twenty—and my lips were thin and anxious-looking and hers were sassy cupid's bows, generous and kissable. I don't mind telling you, that picture took me back.

I said to Benedict, "Don't you wish you knew who the girl is?"

"She's Ed's wife," Harry said.

Benedict said, "Thanks for clearing up muddy water. Now you can tell us who Ed is."

Harry had found a gold pocket watch he thought he could make run again. "I can tell you who he isn't—Uncle Fox Warner's son."

Benedict went off with her boyfriend that afternoon—an ice cream salesman who eventually became her second husband. She left the mementos behind, scattered all over my rug. Putting them back in the box I got moony over Shirley.

"She's pregnant," I said to Harry.

Pregnancy was not our best subject. "All you can see is her head, Lucille."

"Her head is enough. See how milky-looking she is around the eyes?"

"You'd be milky-looking too if you weren't but twenty and your husband had lost the best part of his hair."

Harry isn't a vain man but if he's proud of anything it's what grows on his head. "A receding hairline can't hold a candle to that polka dot shirt and flowered tie."

Harry reminded me, "Guys in the army liked to wear flashy civvies whenever they got a chance."

I said I doubted if Ed was in the service. "I bet as soon as he got his draft notice he went around the barn and shot his toe off."

Harry laughed. "You're pretty hard on old Ed."

"Ed was hard on Shirley, getting her pregnant in the middle of a war."

The delicate truth I was ironically referring to was that Harry got me pregnant in the middle of the same war. I wasn't finished with high school and the next thing I knew I was Private Warner's wife sharing a boarding house room with two older ladies outside an air force base in Texas. Camp followers, some people called us. I lost the baby. It ejected without ceremony onto an examining table in a San Antonio clinic. The doctor let me put my skirt back on and walk out of there. Naturally an infection set in, calling a halt to all future babies. I went on following Harry, though. There wasn't much else I could do. School was out and I hadn't graduated.

On the way to Benedict's I said to Harry, "I should have found something else to cover up the pansy plant.

"It's nothing to worry about," he said. "Just forget it."

But I couldn't forget it. "In 1944 Ed put out a chunk of money for those pictures of him and Shirley."

"He was a gambler, you've always insisted, with money running out of his ears."

I've never been fond of Ed. He has a weak look. But I've never been crazy about Shirley either. I don't trust a woman who counts too much on being pretty, as Shirley plainly does or she never would have been photographed in that coy pose looking over her shoulder. Still, it was a mistake tossing them out in the cold, exposing two dressed-up people to the possibility of sleet and the lifted hind legs of the neighborhood dogs.

Harry got tired of listening to me fret. "Stop worrying," he said. "It's not as if they were friends of ours."

I was shocked at Harry. "You can't say they're strangers."

After New Year's Day, 1957, Harry and I moved every two or three months, snailtracking across the Oklahoma oilfields. Mixed in with the necessary junk we dragged around the country was Benedict's box of mementos. She was in school then, renting a cramped little room, and then she was divorced and living in an efficiency apartment. I guess most people have a box like that, stuff they don't want but can't get rid of.

Eventually I stopped being surprised when I pulled out a drawer and found Ed and Shirley lounging around inside. But it always rankled that those two had a child growing up about the same age as ours would have been if somebody had revoked that quack doctor's license.

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Ever so often I said to Harry, "These people aren't even kin to us. I'm pitching them out."

Harry said to me, "Let's wait awhile." Or he said, "What's the point after fifteen years?"

After twenty years he said, "Tossing them out now would be a sacrilege."

I let him get away with that half-baked opinion until we bought our house last year and settled down in Chickasha. Then I sorted through everything and while Harry was mowing the lawn I filled a trash can.

In a little while he came out to the kitchen. "Guess what blew off the back end of the garbage truck?"

Like a simpleton I cried. All those years. I was never going to be rid of them.

"You think Shirley's cute, don't you?" I burst out. "Ever since you saw her you've been wishing it was her you were married to instead of me."

Harry couldn't bridge the gap fast enough to say boo.

"Go on!" I hollered, as uncertain again as a bride of sixteen. "Do what you've been dying to—give them a page in the family album."

He got on his high horse. "They're nothing special to me."

"You dragged them back in the house didn't you?"

"Cars were running over them!"

I should have been awarded an Oscar for the way I pranced off to the living room and rigged up a shrine. On top of the piano I arranged a vase of artificial nasturtiums beside Ed and Shirley and let the milk glass lamp beam lovingly down on their dumb, placid faces. The preacher's wife across the street saw the light burning and trotted over for a chat.

Harry told her, "These are Lucille's cousins, Mrs. Bertner. The salt of the earth. They're missionaries in Africa."

The fight we had afterward was the best thing that ever happened to us. It cleared the air back to the start of World War II. Early in the morning, lying alongside Harry I told him, "It'll serve you right if the church takes up a love offering for Ed and Shirley."

Harry chucked me under my second chin. "It'll serve us both right. We'll take a trip to Hawaii."

Benedict, who is single for the third time, served us roast beef with horseradish today. I would have preferred gravy. After dinner she reminisced in the pine-paneled den the ice cream salesman built her.

"Does anybody remember the Christmas Lucille caught fire to the coconut pie?"

"It was New Year's," I said, "1957."

Harry said, "Lucille was told beforehand that the question might come up and wrote the date inside her cuff."

Ben frowned. "What do you mean, Harry?"

"I think he's quoting your joke. The afternoon the pie burned up."

She didn't recall making a joke. "What I remember is that picture of me naked on a fur rug—and Gracey and her husband."

"Who?" I said.

"The girl with the pompadour. The guy with the ears that could pick up Chicago. Did I ever tell you I was right? They did rent rooms at Mama's. I asked Putter McAdoo."

Putter McAdoo was a hometown boy who really did go behind the barn and shoot his toe off, so he was around through the whole war to get acquainted with the tenants in Mother Warner's house.

"It wasn't Gracey," I said. "Shirley was her name. Shirley and Ed."

Ben's look was skeptical. "Shirley? Are you sure? Well, it doesn't matter—they got killed anyway."

"Who?" I said.

"The couple we're talking about, Lucille. Gracey or Shirley, and what's-his-name."

"Killed?" Harry looked green. "Who told you so?"

"Putter McAdoo. Isn't anybody listening?"

"When?" I said.

"Ten or twelve years ago. I went out with him for awhile between Clinton and Joseph."

My mouth got awfully dry. "I mean when were they killed?"

"Sometime during the war. They were moving from Mama's and a train hit their car down along the Louisiana border."

"A train." I turned around to Harry. "That stupid Ed. He ran their car up on a railroad track."

Harry said, "Who was driving, Ben?"

"Does it make any difference, for God's sake? It was forty years ago."

"There could have been a fog, Lucille. Or they might have had the windows rolled up and the radio on."

I said, "Don't tell me what happened. He gambled on beating that train."

"Shirley could have been driving."

"Harry," I said, "Shirley was six months pregnant."

When we turned in our driveway the car lights picked up the square shape of the soup box. Everything around it that wasn't covered looked stiff and frozen.

"I'll get out here," I said. "I'm going to bring the pictures inside."

Harry rolled on toward the garage. "Don't, Lucille. I don't want you to."

"I feel as bad as you do, Harry."

"Then you know we'd feel worse if we looked at the pictures."

"Harry, listen. Ben could have had the wrong couple. She called Shirley 'Gracey.' The only thing Putter had to go on was her description. Think how many girls with pompadours could have lived at your mother's. Think how many guys have ears as big as Ed's."

"Ben could have been right, though."

"If they were really dead do you think all these years we wouldn't have known it?"

Harry stopped the car and shut off the motor. "I do have the feeling they might be living somewhere close by. In Tulsa maybe. Or over in Ardmore."

"So do I, Harry." I pecked him on the cheek. "Let's go get the pictures."

"Ben would think we're crazy."

"Ben is incapable of lasting attachments." □

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DANIEL TOWNER

THREE WHISTLES

i

The fan in the window, having turned
like a dream all night, still turns,
still moves the hot air over my body, hot
and the Amtrak whistle blows in the distance,
its one strange note embedded in familiarity:
the moment before waking
is red, red
as the heat in 1928 when I
slept, the fan droning in my grandmother's attic,
and heard from sleep the Illinois Central whistle
sing over the reddening leaves. Now! it sings,
It is now! and I hear the *tick tick* of the woodstove heating,
and soon comes my father's voice calling, "Will you get up?"
And the hot air moves over my body,
and he calls again, "Will you get up?"

And at breakfast, the eggs healing themselves in the pan,
the whistle still shrill, still
both looming and small like a mountain in the distance,
my father comes suddenly alert, smiling, to the sound.
"A man could set his watch—or a boy, too."

So I am not late for this day,
despite the heat, despite the hogs of my nascence,
who lift their heads in torpor and grunt, "Hot?"
Despite Rosie Hamm, thirteen and in the second grade,
dirty, carrying her lunch in a dented Karo pail,
denting it further on the heads of the taunting first graders—
she calls us Pwi-marry, as if vile things—
and takes her leave like a lady: "Dod *damn*!"

Am not late for this day
when Miss Ramsey, angry, keeps class after, demanding
the whereabouts of her new lace handkerchief.
And Rosie Hamm in shame and pride holds up her hand.
"Is this it?" she asks, waving the handkerchief,
hanging her red face.

And the familiar whistle sings and sings over the soft hills.

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ii

and then it will be 1935,
and I will follow the Illinois whistle west
to New Mexico, and live in that red land north
of Albuquerque, on my aunt's farm
near a crossing called West Detritus Wash,
and during the summer pick the apples there
and earn fifty cents a day,
twice what she pays the Mexicans,
and read "A Simple Heart" by Flaubert,
in which the Holy Spirit is portrayed as a huge green parrot
hovering over the dying pauper maid.

Aunt Bunt
is good, And if my son of a bitch brother
hadn't come out the year before and stripped the Model A,
laughing in the face of her kindness,
I could have driven it to school, she is so kind.

And crazy, land-rich, but wears the same print dress
every day, so it's worn through in the back
from where she sits in her ratty chair and comments aloud to herself
on my parentage, personal hygiene, and imminent depravity.

And comes out to gather apples for a pie,
Mexicans staring with dark blank faces under identical fedoras,
and I rushing to her, reddening, with a shirtful.

"I believe I can get my own apples," she says.

And climbs a tree slowly in her old dress,
without underwear, the red sun hanging in the branches,
and the son of a bitching Mexicans look up,
showing their rotted and their gold teeth, look up
into the shadow at the darkening flesh, the dark pink, and that other darkness,
and I look up, and at the crutting Mexicans,
and at my aunt, Aunt Bunt.

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iii

and then it will be later,
and I think in the dark heat, This
is my wife. I, a husband.
And I move into her in the old way,
at night, and she asks, "Do you
love me?"

And I say yes.

"And desire?"

Yes: but I do not tell her how they won't meet,
the two, twined
like a white and red festoon tacked to the door,
never of a piece. I do not ask, Where
do they divide?
Because if she could tell me where they divide
she could tell me where they join.

I say yes:
the word driven in like a wedge.

And then there is a family,
but they die or go away.

And to all the questions I answer yes.

iv

and then it will be now. Now,
when the ancient red sun hangs
below the horizon, and the Amtrak whistles
far off, and in the grey light a grackle,
with unblinking eye pecks at the garbage outside my window.

What comes between red and red?
If I could make myself look and not be ashamed:
if I could look I would see only shame,
where things divide, and join,
where the legs divide and join.

And the Amtrak sings and sings, its note
of familiarity wedded with its note
of strangeness. Shame! it sings. In a major chord, Shame!
holding the iridescent black bird
and me together, and releasing us,
and holding us again in a shrill moment.
It sings, tremulous
with color and heat, like the long vowel
that rises in chorus from the round mouths of the lost.

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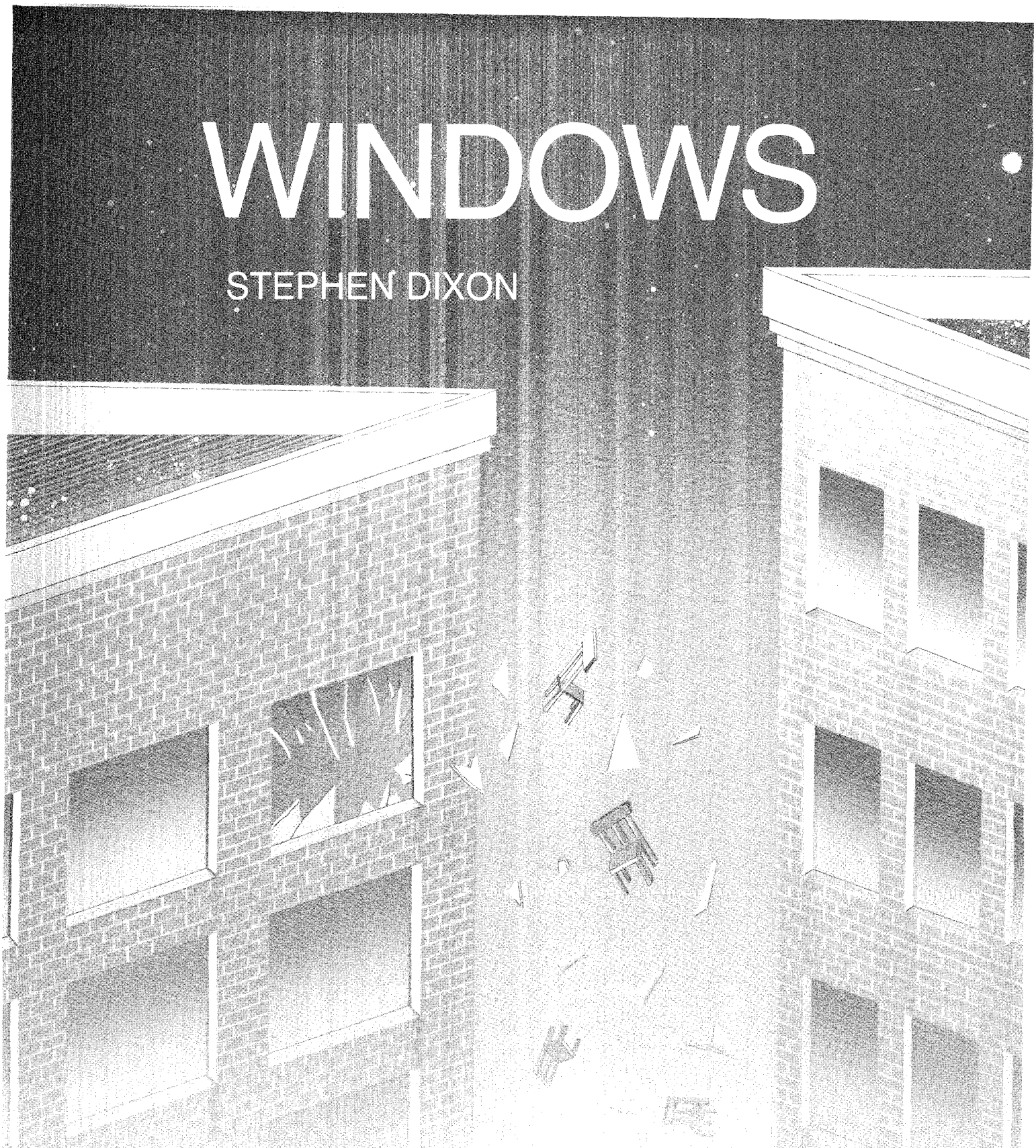
WINDOWS

STEPHEN DIXON



Nothing's on his mind. Can't read, doesn't want to sit around the apartment and snack anymore. If he stays here any longer he'll uncork a bottle of wine and just drink it down while he looks out the window, stares at the walls, ceiling light fixture and the floor. He gets up to go out. But if I go out, he thinks, where will I go? Take a walk, see what you'll see. Don't stick around here doing nothing, ending up sleepy from all the wine, overstuffed from all the snacks, asleep by seven or eight so up around four or five in the morning and then what'll you do? More staring, eating, drinking. Maybe try the newspaper again.

He sits down, opens the newspaper. Explosion someplace. A woman shot. A woman raped. Two boys find a decomposed body on a beach. Milton Bax wins Endenta Prize. New movies. Spy grabbed. Two dozen pregnant whales run aground. Famous physicist dies of mysterious disease. A young woman crossed the ocean in a canoe. Television listings. Sports. Ads. Juniper Holland's "per-

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fect brownie" recipe. He crumples up the paper, sticks it into the fireplace. Lights the paper, watches it burn. An ash floats through a hole in the fireplace screen and he grabs it in the air. His hand's smudged from the ash. He rubs his hand on his pants. Now his pants are smudged. He brushes his pants till only an indelible spot's left. He sits in the chair. Think about something. Let something just come to mind. Daydream.

He remembers a real event. It was a number of years ago. Three. He was married then and was changing the baby's diapers. Esther. "I peepee," she liked to say, and he or Jill would change her. "If you know when you peepee," he used to say, "then you should try to peepee and kaka into the toilet." "Toilet?" she used to say. "Potty," he used to say. "Potty and toilet, same thing." "Same thing?" she used to say. "Sweetheart, don't repeat everything I say." "Don't repeat?" she used to say. Though it only sounded a little like "Don't repeat." Like her "toilet" only sounded a little like "toilet." "Potty" she could say. "Dough repee," she used to say. "Toyet. Same sin." She didn't peepee into the toilet till she was three. People said that was very late. He and his wife didn't mind her not using the toilet till then. Some things one gets used to. And he liked changing her most times. The softness of the diapers, patting her crotch and bottom with a warm washrag, drying her, pinning the diapers on her, the rubber pants, the long pants or stretchies or shorts. She would be on her back on the changing board and he would be sitting in front of her on the same bed and he would often lean over and kiss her forehead or the top of her head or her cheek. Sometimes he'd say "Kiss daddy," and she'd kiss his cheek. Then he'd finish dressing her, if he hadn't already finished, and stand her up on the floor or just lift her off the board and put her into or back into bed.

But he was changing her, he remembers, when the phone rang. He looks at his hand. Still a little dirt. He picks at it with his fingernail, then spits into a handkerchief and rubs it into his hand till the spot's gone. It's not that I mind dirt, he thinks. He smells his hand. It smells from spit, but that'll go away quickly enough. And an ash really isn't dirt. I could, in fact, almost any other day, walk around with my hand smudged like that or even worse. Not the whole hand smudged, but a much larger spot than there was. Anyway: walk around or just stay here without paying attention to the smudge till it disappeared through nothing I consciously did.

He turns around and looks out the window. About fifteen feet from his window are two windows in a brick wall. Above the wall—his apartment and the apartment or apartments he's looking at are on the top floors of their buildings—is some gray sky. Maybe I should stare at that slit of sky till something passes in it. A bird, helicopter, sheet of newspaper, a plane. Rain, even. Stare till it rains. It can't snow. Not the season for it. What else could be in the sky that might pass, drop, stay there awhile, float by? A cloud, of course. Hailstones would be unlikely. A balloon. On the other side of the building he's looking at is a street. Someone could walk on it holding a balloon. The balloon could be released, accidentally, intentionally, and float past that slit of sky he's looking at. He looks at that sky for around two more minutes, tells himself to look at it another minute and if nothing passes in it, to stop. He looks at it another minute. Nothing passes. He faces forward, rests his head back against the chair, remembers.

The phone rang. He yelled something like "Jill, would you get it?—I'm changing the baby." She yelled she would and ran to her studio from wherever she was and picked up the phone. "Oh Randi," she said, "hi," and that's all he remembers hearing from that phone call. That was all he heard. Because he remembers that maybe an hour later he thought about why he hadn't heard more of the phone conversation than just "Oh Randi, hi," and decided it was because she must have started speaking very low after that or else had shut the door. He never asked her about it, though once or twice had wanted to. But she came into the baby's room a few minutes later, while he was on the floor putting away Esther's books and toys and Esther was sitting on the floor trying to string beads, and looked very sad. She was very sad, but when she came into the room, or rather, stood inside the door with her shoulder against the jamb, as if, if she didn't lean against it she wouldn't be able to stand, all he could tell was that she looked very sad. What he thought then was that she was sad because of something she'd learned over the phone or something that had happened to her since she put the phone down. Because, he thought, what could Randi have told her that made her look so sad? And how come she didn't let him speak to Randi? Randi was his niece. They were quite close. Maybe Randi had called to tell him something about his sister, but something so terrible that she was now relieved she wouldn't have to be the one to tell him. "What is it," he said, "something wrong?" She nodded. She brought her hand up to her mouth.

He hears a plane, turns around to that slit of sky but doesn't see anything. Then he sees it for a couple of seconds. Flying west. A jumbo jet. It could be going to any number of places. California, Tahiti, Japan. It could be going, eventually, east. If it is, it'll soon turn around. But chances are much better, not that he really knows what he's talking about, that it's going west, or west now but north or south soon. He looks at the two windows. He's never seen anyone in the right one. The shade's always down. Never even seen the room. He's seen artificial light behind the shade. In the evening, very late, maybe five or six times. But he's never seen the shade raised even an inch from the sill in the year and two months he's lived here. The fourteen months since Jill asked him to leave their apartment, which he did and got this apartment that same day. In the other window—it's much smaller—he's seen a woman showering maybe fifteen times. Showering or just shampooing, if one doesn't always shower, meaning clean one's body, which he's never seen her do, except for her face and neck, when one shampoos. He wonders if the shaded window is part of the same apartment as that bathroom. The bathroom door is at the end of the left wall. If it was in the right wall, then the bathroom would have to lead to the shaded room. Though maybe the shaded room is a hallway in that apartment or a public hallway in that building. If he steps

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up to his window he can see four windows on the same floor to the right of the shaded window, two with blinds, two with shades, all opened or closed or lit or unlit at various times of the day, but none, except for the one next to the shaded window and there only a little, can he see inside. Not the right angle or too far away. But a public hallway wouldn't have a shaded window. Makes no sense. For the last two months the bathroom window has had a shade on it. Almost to the sill. Possibly because she caught him watching her showering several times. Sometimes it was by accident. He'd be slumped below the top of the padded chair when he'd hear a shower go on, look around or above the chair and see her showering. Or he'd enter his apartment, shut the door and see her showering. Hear and see at the same time sometimes. The shower part of her bathtub is right by the bathroom window. For a while at night when he came home he wouldn't turn on his apartment light till he found out if she was showering or not. If she was, he'd watch her in the dark till she left the bathroom or put her bathrobe on. If she only put on her underpants or bra, he'd continue to watch her till she left the room. If she put both underclothes on, he'd crawl away from the window to one of the lights, turn it on and stand and go about the apartment as if he just came home. But he only caught her showering once in the eight or so times when he came home and went through this routine, so he gave it up. She's a woman of about thirty-five, somewhat plump, somewhat pretty, who spends a great deal of time lathering her long dark hair. Sometimes he's seen her entirely covered with lather, which would start at her hair and slide down on all sides and sometimes in large clumps to the rest of her body, or the parts of her body he could see above the bathtub rim. He's gotten quite excited sometimes when he's seen her showering or drying herself and then putting on her underclothes. Once when she saw him looking at her while he was standing in the middle of the room and pretending to flip through a magazine, she slammed the window down and pulled the single shower curtain around her where he couldn't see her showering anymore, not that he would have been able to see much through the smoked glass. Once when it was night and he was reading in this chair, he heard her singing in the shower. He doesn't know if he had been so absorbed in the book that he had missed the shower going on, or else if the shower and singing had started at the same time. Anyway, he stood up, with his back to her put the book on the chair, shut the light, opened his door, slammed it, crawled to the far right corner of the window and raised his head just above the sill to watch her. By the time she was drying herself while standing in the tub, he had his pants off and his handkerchief out. He wonders about a woman who'd shower in front of an open window, one that faces another open window, especially one in which she must have known a man had caught or watched her showering several times. Maybe she has a let-him-look attitude about it, all he's seeing is a body, one not much different from any other woman's body her age, and if it does anything to him, it has nothing to do with her. Or maybe she liked showering in front of him, showing off her body, so to speak, the pleasure it might give him, let's say, maybe even showering more times than she normally would because he was there, but then felt the situation had possibilities or ramifications she hadn't thought about, so she stopped. He can't see her toilet or sink from his window. They must be on the right side of the bathroom.

Jill took her hand away from her mouth. He forgets what Esther was doing at the time. She was probably just lying peacefully or squirming a little but on her back. But why'd he pick this particular memory from so long ago? It's the one that came to him, that's all. It could have been one of any number of memories that came to him when he just sat back and let things enter his head. The time his mother died. (He was in the hospital room.) The time Esther was born. (He was in the delivery room.) The time he and Jill got married. (It was in the livingroom of the apartment she and Esther now live in.) The time he learned his brother's plane had disappeared. (He was in his sister's livingroom.) The time Jill ran into the bathroom with her nightgown on fire. (He was on the toilet. She had said from the kitchen only a half-minute before "Do you smell gas?" He had said "No, why—you mean real gas? Do you?") The time Jill accepted his marriage proposal. (He was on his knees in her livingroom, his arms around her legs, crying, while she was rubbing his head with one hand and with the other trying to get him to stand.) The time an ice cream popsicle stuck to the entire top of his tongue. (He was standing on a busy street corner, pointing to his mouth and gagging. The ice cream vendor got in his truck and drove off. A man said "Don't pull on it, kid. It's the dry ice it was packed in. Pull on it and you'll take off half your tongue. Just let it melt a few minutes and it'll come off on its own.") The time Esther fell, though it actually seemed she had flown, down a flight of stairs. (They were in the summer cottage they rented and which Jill still rents. He was in the main room, working at his desk. Something made him look to his left and he saw her flying headfirst down the stairs. The staircase was in the hallway around twenty feet away, but he missed catching her by just a couple of inches at the bottom of the stairs. He doesn't see how that was possible. He must have seen her on one of the top steps, about to fall, and jumped out of his chair and ran to the stairs.) The time they took Esther to the hospital. (They were in their car, minutes after he'd missed catching her at the bottom of the stairs. He was driving. Esther was in Jill's lap in the rear seat, a compress on her nose, towels around her bleeding head. A rabbit jumped across the road and he swerved but hit it. The rabbit flew over the car and landed about fifty feet behind them. He'd hit it while it was in midair. Jill screamed. Esther was unconscious.) The time they waited while the doctors and nurses treated Esther. (It was outside the hospital examination room. They thought she was going to die. One of the doctors had said a few minutes before "I don't know if you know it, but she may die." Jill said "Listen, you imbecile. I know we were negligent, but now's the stupidest time in the world to remind us." The doctor said he didn't mean it that way. Jill said "You did too." Kirt pulled her into him, said "Don't argue, don't bother, don't worry, it'll all turn out all right. It's got to be all right. I'll go crazy if she dies.") The time they buried

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his father. (Cemetery.) His mother. (Same cemetery.) The time he came home from summer camp and his parents said they'd given his dog away.

Jill said to him "—died." He said "Who?" "—Kahn." "What? I'm not hearing you for some reason. Who?" "Gretta Kahn. Gretta Kahn. She died two days ago, Monday." "Oh Jesus, that can't be. It can't. What are you talking about? That was Randi on the phone, right? So what's she got to do with Gretta?" "Not your niece, Randi. Gretta's oldest son, Randy. He called from Charleston. Gretta died in San Diego. A massive heart attack, he said. She was visiting Mona. And because he knew she was such a good friend of ours—" "Her daughter?" "Mona, her daughter and Randy's sister, yes. They're having the funeral in San Diego—something about it's easier to, not the expense—and just wanted us to have the option of coming. I told him I didn't think we could. I was right, wasn't I?" "Come on," he said, "she was too healthy. Anyone but her. Besides, it's too ridiculous. For it was just around this time of year last year—" "That's right. It's like a medical prophecy come true, except it's the reverse of what frequently is supposed to happen in that frequently it's the husband who dies a year after his wife." He remembers she cried, they talked a lot about Gretta that night, neither of them slept well, and this went on for two or three days. She was one of their best friends. And of their best friends, she was just about the nicest of them and the one they loved most. Or else it seemed that way at the time. Was it so? He thinks it was, and if it wasn't, then she came as close as anyone at the time to being the nicest of their best friends and the one they loved the most. They didn't have many friends that both of them considered their best friends. He had best friends, she did. A few they shared. Or he had several fairly good friends, she had several very good friends, and a few of her very good friends he considered fairly good friends of his. What's he talking about? Gretta was a very good close friend of them both. They talked about deep serious things together, all three of them or just when he or Jill was with her. Sometimes. Sometimes they just had a good time together, when not a serious subject or mood came up. Jill and he didn't go to Gretta for advice, either separately or together, and she never came to either of them for it, but when they were with one another, separately or together, they often talked about the most important things in their lives, past or present, including what was bothering them most. When he or Jill were alone with Gretta they also occasionally talked about their respective spouses, something they didn't do with Gretta's husband Ike and Ike didn't do with them, talk personally about Gretta or about anything deep or serious that might interest either of them, though they still considered him to be one of their dearest friends, because he was so generous and warm and Gretta's husband, though maybe not one of their closest. He remembers trying to bring Gretta back then in his thoughts. Three years ago. He remembers that a day or so after Gretta died he said to Jill when the phone was ringing "Maybe that's Randy again, saying it was only a joke and Gretta isn't dead." He remembers Jill saying "That's crazy" or "too bizarre for me." "I know that was crazy or too bizarre," he remembers saying after he or she finished talking to whomever it was on the phone, "what I said about Gretta before, but it was what I wished most. That it had been a joke. To lose Ike one year, Gretta the next? To lose them both? All a joke. For Randy or Mona or whatever the other son's name is—Gene—to say on the phone 'Gretta and Ike are alive. They said they'll explain everything when they get to New York and see you all.'" He remembers lying in bed the next few days thinking of the various ways she could be alive. That it was a seizure of some kind where she appeared dead but wasn't. Or she had been dead but was revived. Where they'd get a letter from Gretta the next day or so explaining why Randy gave Jill that message and why she had to send this letter instead of making a phone call. That it was a bet. That it was part of a plot. That it was a chain of almost inconceivable false and incompetent medical reports from hospital to doctor to Gretta's children. It took him a while to get used to her death.

He hears a shower turned on behind him. He turns around. The shade's down, woman's singing. Both their windows are open. The weather's been gray and unseasonably cool the last few days but has warmed up in the last hour and the sun's now out. He looks at the sky. He recognizes the melody she's singing but can't make out the words. He shuts his eyes and listens. She's singing in French, but he's almost sure the song's American. She has a sweet voice. Professional, almost. For all he knows about singing voices, professional. Dulcet was the word Jill used for a voice this sweet. Jill knew about voices. She listened to opera, lieder and madrigals a few hours a day, once wanted to be an opera singer, sang in several languages in the shower sometimes but would never do it with the window open or so loud. "Sweeter than sweet," she said, "is when you use 'dulcet,' or at least when I use it." He doesn't know if he'd recognize this woman if he saw her on the street. For one thing, it's been a long time since he's seen her in the shower. If he saw her and recognized her would he introduce himself? He doubts it. Of course not. Would she recognize him if she saw him? He doubts it. Maybe she would. Maybe she's already seen him on the street and recognized him several times while all to some of those times he might have looked straight at her but didn't recognize her. He wouldn't mind meeting her. He knows no woman to go out with. He hasn't been to bed with a woman since Jill, though he has been out with a number of them but never more than once or twice each. The third or fourth time is when you often get to go to bed together. He wonders if he should call Jill. He'd ask how she is. She'd say fine, probably, but why did he call? "To find out how you are and to find out, of course—how could you even ask that?—how Esther is." "You spoke to Esther this morning," she could say, "you'll see her this weekend. She's having her supper now." It's around that time. He looks at his wrist. His watch isn't on it. Where'd he leave it? This could lead to a minute or two of panic. Watch, pen and wallet, all quite valuable when one considers the wallet's contents, and all given to him by Jill. Sentimental value then? Not only. But when they're out of his pockets and off his wrist, he likes to keep them together. The dresser. He goes into

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the bathroom, sees the three of them and his checkbook and keys on top of the dresser, looks at the watch. He should buy a clock. A small one, that doesn't tick. It's five after six. Just around the time she'd be eating. He used to like feeding her. "Baby eat meat," she used to say. "Baby eat corn and peas, no beans," though she used to pronounce them "con and peats." Used to like putting the bib on her, making sure her hands were clean and if they weren't, washing them with a little warm water on a paper towel and drying them with the towel's other end. Now she feeds and washes herself, though sometimes when she insists he lets her eat with slightly dirty hands. Now she tucks the napkin into her shirt or spreads it out on her lap, though sometimes he lets her use her sleeve. He used to like feeding her spoonfuls and forkfuls of food, touching the cereal with his tongue before he gave it to her to make sure it wasn't hot. Squeezing orange juice for her almost every morning, every so often squeezing a quarter of a grapefruit to add to the glass. He was usually the first up. Around six. Esther around seven. Jill around eight. Putting her to bed—he liked that too. Bathing her first, though the one who bathed her usually wasn't the one who then read to her and put her to bed. And after he washed her but while she was still playing with her water toys or the soap in the tub, massaging and brushing and flossing his teeth and gums and then applying that sodium bicarb-peroxide paste. He didn't like giving her shampoos. Rubbing her back to get her to sleep. Making love with his wife while the baby slept in the same room. She was always so receptive. His wife was. They loved each other, and he thinks the baby, as much as a one-to-two-year-old could, loved him then too. What went wrong? Why did it have to go wrong? Were there several or many things wrong or just one main one? He still loves Jill but she no longer loves him. That's what she's said so that's what he has to believe. He should go out. Take a walk, see what he sees. Not a movie. Maybe step in for coffee someplace, regular or espresso. Maybe a beer. No beer. He doesn't like drinking in bars alone. Doesn't like eating out alone. Coffee in some stand-up place or on a coffee shop stool is still okay.

The shower's turned off. The singing's stopped. She's probably drying herself but she could also be shaving her underarms or legs. Saw both of those once or twice too. Today she left the shade up a couple of inches, but it's not dark enough outside yet to look. Not dark at all. Anyway, he shouldn't be sneaking looks. Maybe he should go out to buy a men's magazine. One with naked women, but which still has serious articles and maybe serious fiction in it. Photos showing everything, but of women alone or together rather than with naked men. He doesn't like to buy that kind of magazine, give a clerk money and sometimes have to get change back for it, walk home with it rolled up if he doesn't have an envelope or newspaper to put it in, or have it around the apartment. But about every three to four months, maybe two to three months is a closer estimation, he buys one, uses it in his own way, then tears it up after a couple of days and sticks the pieces deep into the garbage bag, makes sure they're covered with garbage, and drops the bag in one of the trash cans in front of his building. But he doesn't want to go out just to buy one of those magazines, though he wishes now he hadn't torn up the last one he bought.

He turns around and looks at the sky. Go out. See what's out there. Call Jill. Ask to speak to Esther. Go to a movie. Go to a bar. Go to a bookstore and buy a book whatever it costs. For the first time in your life, find a book you want very much to read but any other time you'd think way too expensive for you. If you haven't the cash, write a check. If they won't take a check, ask them to put the book aside, leave a deposit for it, go back to the apartment, and next day, or even tonight, if the store's still open and not too far away, get that book. Or just walk along the street. Walk to walk. Walk for exercise. For fresh air. To tire yourself out. Walk all the way downtown. Through the theater district. Past the Village to Lower Broadway. Go to several bookstores and bars and then cab home. Or call Jill and say you're sad and lonely and want to come back to her. "I want us to live as a family again," say. "I love you," say. "I love Esther. It's not that I can't live without you. It's that I don't want to. Living alone's killing me in a way. I sneak looks at the bathroom window across from my apartment. A woman showers there and I want to see her nude. I have seen her nude, she's bought a shade just to keep me from seeing her nude, but I often quickly turn my head to her window hoping the shade's up and she's standing there nude. I have these absurd fantasies about meeting her on the street and going to bed with her. I think about buying those awful men's magazines just to use the photos of naked women in them to alleviate my excitedness. My sexual frustration. My pent-up whatever it is that keeps getting more pent up every day. I have bought those magazines, maybe every other month. I thought of Gretta today. I think of her a lot. Not in a sexual way. I'm sorry I linked those two subjects up like that. One coming after the other. Gretta and sex. Or rather those magazines and Gretta. But I think of her a lot. Those were good days then, the time when we knew her and she died. I mean, we were sad for her. It crippled us for a while. But we were happy with one another then, the time when we knew her and a little after the time she died. The two of us and the three of us, meaning the two of us when that's all there was of us and then with Esther, and you can't say we weren't. I know I had a bad temper. You can't say we weren't happy then. I know I was impossibly moody at times. But I'm getting to understand the reasons why I had those sudden swings of mood and also how to prevent them and I doubt I'll ever get like that again or at least as much." Call and say all that. Or walk or take a cab across town and ring her bell from the lobby and ask to come up. Then say it to her or as much as you think she can take for one time.

A plane's overhead. He looks out the window. The plane passes but not in the part of the sky he's able to see. Jill has a lover now. She's in love. They'll probably get married. That's what she's said. He's met him. Seems like a decent fellow. And tall, handsome, rugged, smart. Esther likes him too. Loves him in a little girl's way, Jill's said. He's wonderful and attentive and devoted to both of them, Jill's said, and when the three of them are together they get along exceptionally well. Go outside. Take that

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walk. Exhaust yourself walking so you'll sleep eight to ten hours straight. Have an exotic coffee outside, have brandies and beer, have a good dinner outside and then buy a book, or buy it before you have dinner, you never would have bought for yourself before and come home. He gets up to go. He hears a shade snapped up. Bathroom's? He looks at his ceiling, floor, slowly turns around to look at that woman's bathroom. It's the shaded room's shade that's up. It must have snapped up by accident. No one seems to be in the room. It's unlit. He goes up to his window and sees a mirror at the end of that room reflecting his building's roof and the light from the sky above it. Someone goes over to the mirror and looks into it. From behind it looks like Gretta. That's the way she looked from behind. He saw her walking away from him, from them, down her road, picking a blossom off a tree, berries off a bush, going into rooms, working in her kitchen, cooking there, putting away dishes there, putting seeds into the bird feeders around her house, snapping pictures, serving hors d'oeuvres, many times. Kind of short, round, hair like that. Shape like that. Way she's fussing with her hair now like that. Then a man, both are fully dressed, comes into view and walks up behind her and hugs her while they both look into the mirror, the man looking over her shoulder. He can't see their faces in the mirror. Their images are entirely blocked by their standing in front of the mirror. Then they turn around and come up to the window, the man with his hand on her shoulder. It's Ike and Gretta. Ike raises his hand to pull the shade down and sees him looking at them. Ike points to him, they stare at him. Gretta seems shocked, Ike amused. He says "Gretta, Ike, oh God, this is too wonderful. Tell me what apartment you're in and I'll run right over. I'm so lonely. I was till I saw you. On and off, I mean, and sad—you can't believe how much—on and off too. Jill and I are divorced. She's going to remarry, while I love her as much as I ever did. That was a lot, remember? but that's not news. Esther's just great. A truly exemplary child. Intelligent, beautiful, generous, precious, good; a real dear. We missed you so. We were devastated by your deaths. The untrue news of them, rather, for here you are. We both loved you so. Love you so, love you, and I know I can still speak for Jill on this. Seeing you now is the best thing that's happened to me in a year. In two, in three. Or come over here. I'm in number nine, apartment 5D. But I'll run over to your place because I know I can get there faster than you could here. Or maybe, with this shade business of Ike's—raising his hand to pull it down, it seemed like—and the look that was on both your faces, you had something else in mind and want me to wait here a half-hour or so. You can hear me through your closed window, can't you?"

He didn't go over to his window. He stood almost at the other end of his room, looking out his window from there. Shade on the window of the once shaded room did snap up, bathroom shade stayed down. He didn't see a mirror in that room. If there is one, and in the place he said there was, then he imagined it before he saw it, for so far he's been too far away from that room to see anything inside. The room's unlit, though. That he can see from where he stands. He goes over to his window and looks inside that room. There's a double bed, made, in there. A night table beside it. A lamp on the table. Ashtray next to the lamp. Radio beside the ashtray. Cup in a saucer on top of the radio. That's all he can see in the room. Spoon in the saucer. Maybe a crack in the wall but nothing's hanging on the part of the wall he can see. What will the tenant think when he or she, if there's only one, sees the shade up? That it snapped up on its own? That a stranger was in the room and let it up? But how will she or he pull it down? Will he or she allow him- or herself to be seen from a window across from that building? It's worth waiting for. Just to see the reaction of that person, if it can be seen, when she or he sees the shade up, and what kind of person lives there.

He moves the chair from the left side of his window to the right. He turns the chair around to the window and pushes it within inches of the window. He opens a bottle of wine, sits in the chair and drinks while he faces at an angle the now unshaded room. The day gets darker. He can see more of the sky from here. His phone hasn't rung, when he's been in his apartment, for almost two days. Stars come out. Two, three, then a few of them. The bathroom window shade stays down. The light in the bathroom goes on and off a few times in the next two hours. Twice it stayed on for only a few seconds, once for almost a half-hour. He finishes three-quarters of the bottle of wine, has to pee. It's now night. Many stars are out. He can see the moon's light but not the moon. The bathroom light hasn't been turned on for about an hour. If the bathroom is part of the same apartment as the bedroom, he's sure the woman who likes to shower would have walked into the bedroom by now. Or at least a door would have opened from the bathroom or some other part of the apartment—a hallway—into the bedroom and let some light into it by now. But no light's come in. A little light from the moon perhaps. But now the bedroom's almost black. He can't see anything inside it. He finishes off the bottle. Now he really has to go to the bathroom or he'll have to do it in his pants right here. Maybe into the bottle, but that would end up being a mess. He tries to hold it in. He doesn't want to miss that person or persons, if there is more than one person living in that apartment containing that room, discovering the shade up and then pulling it down. And he's certain it'll be pulled down. But he can't hold it in anymore and runs to the bathroom. He takes his watch off the dresser while he's there. The shade's still up and the bedroom's still dark when he gets back. An hour later he has to go to the bathroom again. He runs to it, makes, runs to the kitchen and gets a beer out of the refrigerator, runs back to the chair. Nothing's changed in that room. He opens the beer, sips, puts it down, wakes up in the chair and finds the shade down but the room still dark. He doesn't know how long he's been sleeping in the chair. He should take a walk. He looks at his watch. He can't make out the luminescent numerals and hands. He squints. Still can't make them out. He gets up and turns on the side table light. It's past two. That's hard to believe, he thinks. He should go to sleep. Maybe have a bite to eat from the food in the refrigerator and a slice of bread and then go to sleep. No, just take off your clothes, pull out the bed and go to sleep. □

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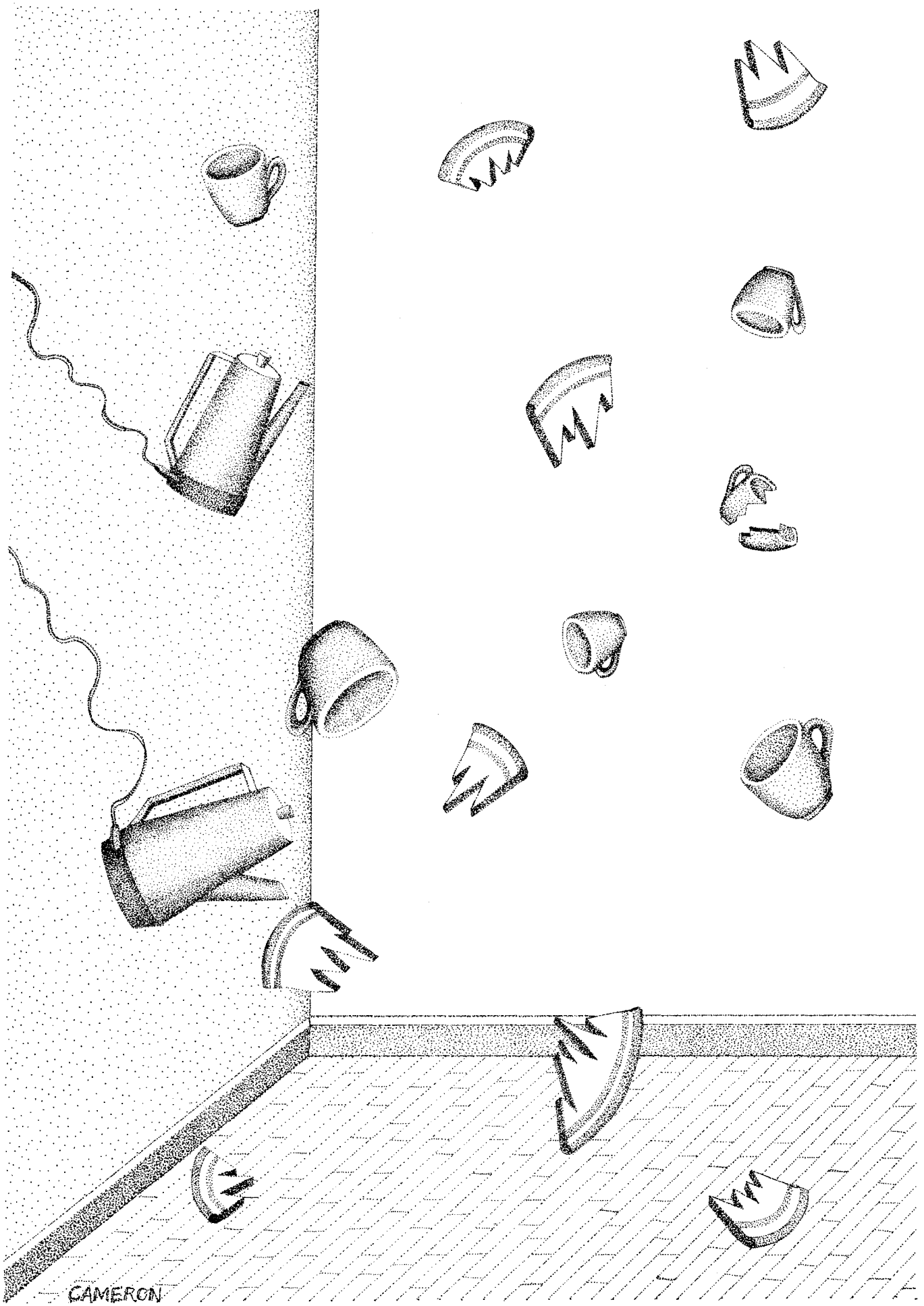

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THE OTHER WORLD I SEE

Fiction by Lee K. Abbott

Several years ago, about the time my wife Vicki began talking about suing me for divorce, my best friend, Newt Grider—who had to him all the virtues you do expect from men in middle age—told me he believed in UFOs. We were on the sixth green of the Deming Country Club, only half-serious about our two dollar nassau but thirsty as Arabs for the beers we would get at the turn, and for an instant, as he had the tendency to mumble or clown, I thought he was speaking French or trying out on me that Howdy-Doody double-talk he used to invent for the entertainment of his daughters. "Boy, you don't believe in nothing," I said; it was banter, like that between Butch and Sundance. He had just smacked a driver and was watching his ball soar off into one of those sunsets our New Mexico has a reputation for, extreme and scary to the animal in us. "Lamar Hoyt," he was saying, "I have known you a long time, right?" To be true, we had been pals of the lifelong sort, since teenagers when we had been in the same Wildcat backfield. We had done everything together: lost our cherries to the same Juarez whore, took in the same experiences I now hear described as necessary but usual. We even lived, in the time I am writing about, on the same block and had the same thoughts about what Vicki used to call the great themes of our age—how to vote and where love comes from and what to do with the weaknesses in you.

For a second—as long, I suspect now, as it took for his ball to land in the way-off fairway—he just looked at me, eyes bright as new pennies, then he said that last night, while all of Deming town was asleep or rolled up next to the TV, he was in his backyard, wearing only pajama bottoms and being addressed by beings from outer goddam space. "Shit," I said, "what're you talking about?" I was looking around for the joke, the way you do on April 1st when your children tell you the car's on fire. "I'm serious," he said. He had the same bent-forward posture he used to get when we'd play cards and a full house would suddenly appear in his hands—earnest as a Baptist, humor a thing for lesser souls who believed in luck. "What do they look like?" I said. I was, of course, imagining the common alien, the one of storybook: green, perhaps slime-dipped, plus the large brain pan of a genius. "They're luminous," he said, "like angels." They were about the size of my oldest boy Taylor, he said, which meant they resembled fifth graders, and they traveled from what you now know is the Vega galaxy, a swirl of planets and dust older than time itself, and they were coming here just as they had been coming all along over the centuries, in magnificent vehicles which made our efforts at combustion and Top Secret propulsion look feeble as camp-fires. "You believe me, don't you?" he said. His voice was dreamy as sleep and, yes, because he was my best friend, I was believing him, just as I have learned to believe all those born-again folks who say that in their swimming pool one afternoon or sitting behind a desk at the Farmers and Merchants Bank there was first a thunderous crack, then something like firmament opening, and finally Christ Himself beckoning forth, all the choirs of the afterworld singing about love and wooden arks.

"You ever lose anything, Lamar?" You should know that we weren't playing golf any longer; in fact, we were just standing to one side of the fairway, letting Mrs. Hal Thibodeaux and three of her lady friends play through. Well, I told him, I'd lost a wallet one time and my high school graduation ring and the keys to the Monte Carlo disappeared at least once a week. "That's not what I'm thinking about," he said. He was thinking about, specifically, people and objects, all those things which were said to vanish in spooky places—boats and planes, and all the people aboard them—plus citizens who were supposed to go to the movies or shopping at the Piggly Wiggly, or big animals, like cows and horses, which are one day there but gone the next. "They got 'em," he said. We were being probed, he told me, and mentioned many names from history of those who knew: a whiskered lunatic named Trismegistus, plus a tribe of fifth century Hebrews, as well as most deep-thinking Orientals of modern times. "How you know all this?" I wondered. They had told him, his small visitors. He had stood in his backyard, watched in breathless suspense as this vehicle had landed silent as snow, and they had popped out of something you would call a port and went up to him

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without the inconvenience of walking and put in his mind, instantly as magic, everything which could be read or spoken or thought. "You know what's up there now?" He was pointing at his own temples and eyeing me as if from a hundred miles away. Near us, in an outfit most folks only wear on Sundays, Mrs. Thibodeaux was flailing with her five iron; and for a time, I confess, I wished I was part of her foursome talking about bridge or what to do with Green Stamps. "Up here," Newt was saying, "is stuff about Lemnos and animus and quote the blood-dimmed tide." He was scaring me, he was, as he had frightened me months before when, soaked with Oso Negro and overtired, he'd shouted that what this republic needed was a good shitstorm, one which would bury the lot of us—him and me, too!—and thus teach us a thing or three about the small, damp beginnings of everything. "What's Alice Mary say?" I asked. She was his wife and, from my view, sweet as any man deserved. "She thinks like you do, that I'm loco." He was fingering his head-bones again and making up such language, he said, as is exchanged between galaxies and the stark reaches of far-off orbs, utterances you can hear anytime from pigs or barnyard fowl. "They want me," he said, "and I do want them."

His plan, I learned, was to be swept up this very evening. "I'm going out in my backyard," he said, "look for them in twilight and go up when they say to." In his face was that divine look which, I suppose, has come over mystics in every time: bright flesh and eyes watery with bliss. "What about the girls?" I said. I was trying to turn his mind to the practical. This was merely upset, I told myself. He was only angry, as we all get, or fretful about money matters. "Lamar," he said, "come over here." He was like me in every respect, so I did as told. He threw his arms around me in that male way, part grapple and part clasp, and said, "These people are my destiny, Lamar. They've known me before I was born, goddammit." All the way back to the clubhouse, one arm still hung over my shoulder, he told me what a delightful world awaited him—air and rare mists and peace—all those words that sound great when you're drunk but in the full light of day, especially in the shitkicker paradise of our desert, sound sentimental as baby-talk. "I'm going to be moving in another dimension," he said when we reached his pick-up. He was still wearing his spikes, plus those shiny green slacks which always brought to mind Pinky Lee. "Say bye-bye to me, Lamar." He was shaking my hand, vigorously, and if I was thinking, I was doing so as more jelly than vertebrate, looking at him as if he was a fresh work of creation, something as shocking as another sun. And then, after he opened his door, he did a brave thing, which was to kiss me on the cheek. "I'll miss you, Lamar," he said, "but I'll be keeping an eye on you from where I am."

This next part is the hard stuff, for I ask you to join me in forgetting for a moment that this is 1984 and that we have been to space itself and do have the Air Force and thousands of Ph.D.'s to tell us otherwise. I want you to think as I have read that Indians and other ancient peoples do—which, as I understand it, is with their hearts and in the company of wise, grumpy sorts from ice underworlds. What you already suspect is indeed true: nearly a decade ago, as has been reconstructed by our police, Newt Grider, smiling like a ninny and got up (Alice Mary says) in a costume which was mostly bed sheet, did wander through his TV room, say no, thanks to a macaroni and cheese casserole, and drift like an ardent juvenile into his backyard from which—in a second or an hour—after some mumbling about twinkles and the cosmic things we are, he utterly and instantly vanished. For several days, Alice Mary was in the panic this deserved. No, she told Sgt. Krebs, there had been no fight, at least not a big one; and no, there was no other woman or any some such, as who would desire something doomed to be a fatso like Jackie Gleason? If they wanted to know, she said, why didn't they talk to old Lamar Hoyt? "I bet he knows where Newt is," she said, "he's a son of a bitch, too."

For a week, exactly as I'd heard it, I told what I knew. I repeated it for Krebs and to a Detective (who sported the Fu Man Chu moustache State Farm men wear) and once to an FBI fellow who wondered how long I'd had my Chevrolet dealership and was it true I'd once been to SMU? One afternoon, I even gave it to a reporter from the *Headlight*, a lady with a lively haircut which would have looked sharp on the corpse of Elvis Presley. It was a "profile" article, she said, but when it appeared, the Newt I loved was nowhere in it. I read only paragraphs and paragraphs about stuff we all knew but had forgotten about: his setting fire, as a teenager, to a cotton field behind the Triangle Drive-In; his opening an irrigation canal and flooding Mr. Bullard's lettuce field; his having a certain drinking problem after the infant death of his only son. There was talk, too, of out-of-body travel and the belief in astrology, plus how you could divine the future in special leg bones. All of which, wrote that lady writer I was liking less and less, sounded like a voodoo smoke-screen for a man who, like thousands and thousands of others in America, was just a plain, matter-of-fact run-away, vamoosed to Peru or another romantic kingdom in search of his lost youth.

It was in here, you must know, that Vicki moved out, taking our sons with her, and time (of which I am partly concerned) became mixed and fluid and dreadful. One day, I am saying, she was here and merely wrought up with the usual strife and dissatisfactions; the next day, she was off in Las Cruces, sixty miles east, living with a club pro named Ivy Martin and telling my children, Buddy and Taylor, that I was beast and dimwit and absolutely without ambition. On another day, I was divorced and lighter the five thousand dollars it cost; and on still another, I say, a year had gone by and I was skinnier by many pounds and lonely as a castaway. It was March, windy but good for sleeping, then it was January, raw as any scrape you get; then it was March again, and I'd look up from my reading and see the walls move (as they do when, for 48 hours, you haven't talked to anything except your own stubbed toe). I'd phone my boys every Sunday and hear about their soccer and that soon Ivy was taking them to Ft. Worth to rub elbows with Lee Trevino and Hubie Green and that Mother, my Vicki, was working at Mode-O-Day and

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maybe looked a little like one of Charley's Angels, all blouse and fly-away hair.

Then one day I grew the beard my shop foreman Poot Tipton said I ought and started to go out. The first time, I remember, I stood in front of the mirror for an hour perhaps, studying myself as I have seen others look at my automobiles they can't afford. I said to myself such hopeful phrases as "You look good, Lamar, you really do," and splashed myself with a modern fragrance Buddy had sent for X-Mas. I smelled like a jungle, I thought, which was maybe right for this world. Poot said I got lucky as that evening I met a woman at the Thunderbird (which is bowling alley and lounge, both); but she was herself divorced ("His name was Veloy and I hope he rots!") and ruined from it. At my house, she walked around and made faces at the knick-knacks I hadn't thown out. Her name was Merri Lu, I learned, but she was contemplating changing it in favor of one which conplimented the exotic sense she now had of herself. "How 'bout Reva?" she said. She was out by the pool, already unbuttoning her shirt. "C'mere, you bastard," she said, "call me Mia and you can have all of this." At that moment, I took a look at myself and saw this: almost forty years old, a little bit Episcopalian, Libra to those who cared, modest about my money, and once upon a time a fair linkster. "Miss Mia," I said, "why don't I take you on home?"

A month later I went out with Poot's sister, Randi. "You're looking studly, boss," he'd said, "you'd be doing her a favor." She had cheekbones I hadn't seen before, severe and red, and the posture of a hatrack. She smoked red-dirt marijuana and claimed she wanted me to join her in the hinterlands of spirit. "What're you thinking about?" she said, "I'm thinking about the Father of all Hindrance." We were in the El Corral bar, a place of cowboy motif and welcome darkness, and I felt as apart from her as I had from Newt the day he disappeared. "You wanna hear about me," she said, "before we go back to your place?" From the bar across the way, I could hear two guys, both dressed like buckaroos, making liquor noises. I heard the word "woo," I believe, and then a string of words, every other one of which was either Mex or obscene. "I look older than 22, don't I?" Randi was speaking to me. "It's carriage and knowing your own mind." She had my chin in her fingers, my lips mashed together; and she had the eyes you see on starved Hindus in *National Geographic*—40 thousand years old and not tired. "I like you," she whispered, "you're gonna be good for my mind, I can tell."

Exactly here it was, in this story I am telling you, that I excused myself, said I had to go to the toilet, then left by the front door. I was heading, I think, to that place I had been tending toward all along.

"Well, I'll be damned," Alice Mary said. "Look what's here on my doorstep."

In jeans and an old T-shirt that could have been Newt's, she appeared young; I was hoping she was still sweet, too.

"I like that beard," she said, "gives you an air."

In the light, she was touch-worthy and I had the urge, which I felt like a fist in the chest, to have her neck and bosom next to mine.

"Where are the girls?" I said.

They were at the Shelby's. A sleep-over.

I must've said a hundred things then, all forgettable and over-used elsewhere, about what a tragedy our world was and what a peckerwood I'd become and how, when something broke, I didn't fix it; and then—bless her—she said, "You're letting the bugs in, close the door," and I followed her inside to a living room that had no trace at all of her absent husband Newt Grider. Something was swimming in me, stomach or neighbor organ.

"You'd like to have me, wouldn't you?"

What I said came out choked, but affirmative.

"You believe I'd like to have you too, don't you?"

That was true, also.

"It won't be any good, you know."

She was being tough, which this deserved, and I was grateful.

"I had a guy in here last week," she said. "Told me I was the saddest piece of ass he'd ever known."

I'd seen the truck. A Blazer, gray over white, one of its headlamps cockeyed. Plus a muffler my people could repair for under thirty dollars.

"Okay," she said, "let's try this thing."

Folks, there is something in a man, independent of his lustful underhalf, which loosens and grows light when a woman shows him that she's a creature too; time stops and even before clothes are shed, or noises made, there is something—composed of gland and the way you are taught, I suspect—that makes you think you are wise when you are dumb, able when you are not. Alice Mary was right: we were witless and fumble-fingered as virgins, shy and fearful. We tried for an hour, I think, even kissing a labor. As lovers are supposed to do, we went after each other in a fury, but, I am telling you now, all the heart was out of it. She was brave, and I was brave, and then, after it became certain that courage wasn't the substance called for, she said, "Lamar, I think you ought to go home now."

She had my underpants in her fist, being helpful.

"I could come over tomorrow," I said.

"No, you couldn't," she said.

She was right about this, too: there wasn't anything between us but her husband and my wife, and they were in the distant world.

"You're a cute guy," she said, "don't be a fool." She gripped me by the ears and kissed my beezer, which is the feature most people see first.

And then, in what I know to be the end of this narrative, I was outside, my house down the street lit up like a ballpark. Its neighbors were all dark and middle-class, here and there a lightbulb glowing. My heart felt as if it belonged to another man, leaky and floppy at the valves, and thoughts were reaching me as if by telegraph, clipped but steady. "Okay, Newt Grider," I said, "where are you now?" Everywhere the sky was random twinkle and black as the cape a witch wears. I was ready, I knew, as Newt had been—ready for our advanced visitors to hover near and draw your hero up into their world where everything which is ever lost or put aside or misplaced is gathered together, waiting. □

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DIRT ANGEL

JEANNE WILMOT

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It is the time of year the gypsies come out of hibernation. The ochre-faced children make an altar of plastic roses when they see me heading down Broadway straight to Said's. I recognize the little ones who are new to the marketplace even though the willful charcoal eyes and the con are familiar. They learn to spit at grace young here. Immediately after returning from the hospital I changed out of the summer seersucker I wear under my white resident's coat by day, into a red two-piece halter and shawl that match the first spring air. When I enter the club, Page is holding court from his usual corner, speaking in chants that are in keeping with the cadence of his gang days, stabbing down into the air with his fingers, floating high on The Hawk with the dust of an angel. I haven't been to Said's for a while. Haven't seen Page for longer. Tonight I needed to be back home. I like my life now all right, but this place, Page and the people here manage to sustain something close to the sense of silent *commotion* I associate with home—there is no routine, crisis is our energy and the silence is just the waiting for something to happen.

Page glances at me quick as I rock into the center of the club, swivel-headed and a little coked up. A beautiful sandy-haired woman-child straddling a stool at the bar fixes on my small breasts. She looks as white as I look black, and for all her sexual smugness, I can smell the captive in her. Tall ferns and palms sway to a breeze propelled by a wind machine that rocks the third-sex lovers lined up against the street windows. Instead of looking out onto the fantastical tropics of Macao, they see a homeland of yellow cabs and midwestern boys with swollen hormonal breasts. I rhyme with the chants until the music starts playing and Page strolls over to kiss my ear, aiming intuitively through burnt red eyes. In '59 we'd been kids together on John R and Brush in Detroit, playing bobo bedetton dotton games with sticks, balls and jump ropes. Half the snowfiends in the club are from blocks like mine; and although some might say I fucked destiny standing up, I could still catch the disease. The sandy-haired girl with the translucent skin was probably destined for the Henderson, North Carolina Junior League and she's caught it. Page calls her Pandy.

I look more closely at this girl Pandy. She wants me to watch her, and for a moment it's as if I'm in the presence of royalty, the red and blue lights of Said's reaching through her rich blonde curls and across the tiny features placed perfectly upon Pandy's anglo-saxon face. However, there is a trapped expression in her eyes as they embrace mine. She stands up and immediately I see that she is pregnant. Probably close to seven months. She is surrounded by the sycophants and true admirers of her court. The French silk and sequin shirt she wears covers her filled belly. She gracefully strides over to the dance floor. Her transition from empress to royal mother is effortless. It could humble the barren. She has engaged me without having to say a word. Page says she always wears sequins. That she is referred to as The Sequin.

My eyes follow The Sequin's stride to the middle of the neon room where she automatically demands center spot. Her competition plays fierce and violent around her for a few minutes until it is absorbed into her dance. Joyfully the other dancers join the girl, not puzzled in the slightest by her grace and agility. She has two partners, likewise her partners, seven in all trading off girl for boy, boy for girl—little ambidextrous babies riding high on the mania of pills and madness. They dance fast. Jerky to the beat, step to step on sparkling shoes with stilt-heels, dervish turns Latin style, calling out high-pitched expletives meant to dot the same place in each skull. I watch the naked backs of the dancing boys, their greased spines like healthy roots, with my eyes clinging tenuously to their ancient strength. Go down, go down on your boy, hump him from the back, hump him in the front—girl to girl, belly to belly, boy to boy up to down—fast now not Latin erotic-smooth, fast bumping here and there, fast computer motions clicking on the upstroke, a slighter downbeat, bent knees, flamboyant male arms, rigid but cool female arms.

Pandy's earthbound body compels her partners to remain rooted. The floor chants, *she's so cool, she's ice-box cool.* Little thirteen-year-old girls undulate involuntarily on the sidelines, their firm little bodies seasonably in need of the bizarre, calling back *I'm so cool, I'm ice-box cool,* while their boys move next to them—each forsaking the other with the fantasy of making it with this sequined mothergirl and her androgynous entourage. I smirk at her glitter but its blood-color takes me captive. I fight her glory, yet her urgency wins. It might be the coke, or it might be that we each know about stepping out of one world into others, being watched as travelers always in-between, claiming a love or a hate for some recent home whose legacy we daily tangle into more lie than truth, or it might be that our lives intersect at a place beyond the gypsies, who, afoot for the spring thaw, remind us both that rebirth applies to all things. Whatever it is, she's taken my night from me, and maybe more.

A little girl painted head to toe in white paint over her dark skin, wearing a black hood over her hair, pasties over her breasts and a g-string-like facade over her tiny cunt, grabs my hand suddenly and pulls me out to the dance floor. She doesn't belong here. Someone must have brought her as a mascot, a cruel joke. She belongs downtown. Page grins as she high-steps smoothly around me, softly leading me into a sensual counterpoint to the erratic moves of the dancers around us. We dance a slow hypnotic grind at first, half-time to the chant. Only our knees move, deliberately and in unison. The Sequin struts out and stands opposite us. Her stomach is thrust forward and proud. The seven-headed Dancing Machine stops to watch their girl come on cold. She is the star here. The Sequin turns her misshapen body to me, grasps me around the waist, and pulls me against her groin. I initiate a gesture of contempt; but knowing he has to get Pandy away from me fast, Page slithers up laughing. He grabs Pandy around her waist and flips her toward him, twirling her the way a father would his child, gleefully offering a

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moment's different reality in the sweeping motion of a top, then releases her on the sideline before returning to me. Page's attention has short-circuited the tension and The Sequin becomes no more than one of the sweet dancing girls I grew up with. The touch of a man has lessened the weight of her child so that she laughs as if through liquid. I continue to dance, waiting patiently while Page slides down off his sloppy high. He holds me close as the song comes to its end.

Page had been my first and I float along with that memory. He was tall and light-skinned. Almost pretty. Considered one of the lucky ones in those days. But he didn't deal in lucky. He had a brutal and facile mind. He chose me. I had style, no great beauty, but could go toe to toe with him on any scheme. None of us thought he'd ever get hooked. We dance until his eyes return to the bright they used to be after he'd beat me at stick ball, and at the very moment this nostalgic mist could have turned into regret and accusation, Pandy touches me on the shoulder. Dugie takes you up and dugie takes you down, so part of the glitter of a sequin is the artificiality of its evanescence. I choose to sleep the tragedy of what has made me one thing and Page a junkie, and decide instead to caress those blazing eyes that seem to leap from the dark rims set into Pandy's face. Drug solitude is common here, so I let her hold me from behind and dance with us.

I smell the rot of Pandy's imminent death. Someone else might miss the agony of her exile and sensationalize the choices she must have made, but I imagine that within Pandy's doom there is something pure and hyperbolic. There are separate, individual pains that are more vile in their means to exile that exile itself. It is an organic condition, not metaphor, and I want to flee from it. I want to walk right out of Said's and out of New York, out of the universe for that matter.

But instead, I take Pandy home with me that night, passing through streets littered with pigeon bone and bottle caps. My place is between Ninth and Tenth Avenues in the fifties. She uses my egg poacher as a cooker and shoots up at the kitchen table while we talk about setting the styles with rags, bandanas and second-hand acetate Gucci's later sells to the weary rich. As Pandy speaks, she plucks the air with her long fingers, drawing bows and barrettes and ankle bracelets on the air. I soon tire of her meanderings.

"Why are you having this baby? You're doing everything you possibly can to maim it."

She looks straight at me, not at all surprised by my brash change of subject.

"I'm not really a junkie. I just like to get high sometimes."

"All the time looks like to me."

"No, that's not really true. I go a day or two without nothin."

"Why do you say *nothin*? Was that the way you were taught to talk?"

"Don't be so hard on me. I'd like to be your friend."

"Sorry, I don't make friends easily. And they never make me."

I turn on her. She can't hold her head up any longer. She nods onto the table so I carry her to the chair and try to make her as comfortable as possible, surrounding her with old clothes I shape into pillows. I put an extra blanket my mother had left in the project when she died over Pandy's birdlike ankles and legs—they could have been my mother's. She half-dozes as I rinse out the dishes in the sink and prepare for bed. I'm angry with myself for finding Pandy so compelling.

She startles me when she speaks out.

"Why did you cover my legs with the blanket and tuck me into a bed you made if you hate me?"

"I don't hate you, I just don't know what you want from me, and I know it's something."

The twilight color of pre-dawn lights up one square foot on the rug in my first floor room. Pandy leaves the nest I made her, twists her hair up into a little knot on top of her head and angles around the room. I light a joint and sit on the edge of my bed, following her transit around the room. She watches me a minute. I don't say anything. Finally she does.

"You know, I used to be a cheerleader."

"So did I."

I can visualize Pandy's light hair in a flip and her lithe body wrapped in a red uniform as a highlight to the Henderson, North Carolina School Yearbook.

I am hooked by her vulnerability and decay in the same way I was by my mother's in the days before her death. But their decay is also my anger and defense. My mother's swollen alcoholic belly pressing against an organ that eventually turned her yellow and filled her tissues with the excrement of a body gone mad was my ticket out.

I decide to get ready for bed. I go first into the little room that holds the toilet, strip and grab a towel from the closet, then out to the screened-in area around the sink and bathtub. I stay behind the matchstick curtains for an unusually long time. Still, Pandy is not asleep when I pull the blanket back on my bed.

"I'll take you home with me tomorrow night."

Her unpredictability is as engaging as her vulnerability. Again, reminscent. I would pay a lot of money if this were not the case. If I could resist.

In the morning I leave for rounds at my usual time, tired but this isn't the first time. I trust Pandy to be there with nothing missing when I return in the evening. Our intimacy is automatic and for me, uncomfortable. That night when I come home, she is dressed up in a plaid pleated skirt designed in such a way that she barely looks pregnant. She is a very small woman anyway. Her baby looks like it might be as well. She has cleaned my apartment, probably shot up for the day, been to her own place and gone shopping.

"You're coming over for dinner."

I'm not wild about the idea but decide to go anyway. We take the IRT express up to "25th" and then walk crosstown. I don't know East Harlem all that well and the further east we go, the more uneasy I become. We don't talk much. We zigzag uptown, turn off the avenue and onto a rural mud street, heading toward the East River. We could be anywhere. Empty lots filled with city weeds

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and brick dust shroud the uneven boundaries of the street. I notice the wild dogs snarling in harmony with each other when we pass them in the brush.

We leave the path, abandoned totally now by the city's compass of light. Pandy strikes a match and pokes her foot into the familiar earth as we continue to walk. Eventually we hit metal. I assume it is the old tracks from trains that used to carry the rich out of the city. Along the tracks a cement slab interrupted by periodic holes covered with gratings gives Pandy the direction she needs. The only peculiarity that makes these openings different from sewer covers is the large padlocks evidently holding sections of the gratings together. Pandy takes out a cylindrical key and opens one of these locks. She does it with a brief finesse that claims it as her home.

Pandy lifts the city grate up and drops it against the cement, then unlocks another padlock and shoves something heavy and metal inward. A gaslight globe lights our way down a flight of cement steps which opens onto a cave charmed only slightly by the touch of humanity. I notice the lamp immediately. The floor is packed mud, the walls cinder block, and in the center a small generator Pandy has switched on offers a glitter to the room. There is no bathroom. The generator seems also to hype up an hydraulic pump that brings water to a tiny sink Pandy uses to both wash her hands and to pee in. The lamp possesses one corner, a bentwood rocker belonging in a young married's apartment another, a pile of neatly folded clothing the third, and finally, standing on an orange crate, a bowl filled with goldfish floating on top of scummy water. The bed is swung up against the wall exposing bits and pieces draped onto the wire tapestry at odd intervals. Between the aquarium and the clothes, a metal door covered with posters of dark, dead jazz musicians stands ajar.

"Come and see the neighborhood."

"Is this where you live all the time?"

"It's my home, if that's what you mean."

The doorway leads out to the old subway tracks unused by the city since the 'twenties. The backs of an entire community of these part-mud part-cement huts, all with doorways leading out to the tracks, line the ledge that eventually falls off into the pit of dead rails. From the stench it is obvious that this area is used for all forms of refuse, consumed daily by the rats that now slink around our legs.

I know rats. I move cautiously, remembering their feel on my face babied with milk, back in Detroit. Here the constant motion their squat bodies create imprisons me. In fact, the tracks themselves are fur-lined with the backs of these Norwegian city squirrels used to eating babies' faces and the mothers' arms that hold them. The hebephrenic calm of shock allows me a moment to adjust; yet even as I stand paralyzed, I can see that the rats are like pets in this neighborhood. Doglike in their sensibility, the rats know if they don't graze on the flesh of their strange life-fellows, they will be fed a daily menu of garbage and human feces. Whirring armies of flying beetles the size of small mice stop just short of attacking my head. I sense in their kingdom the same peculiar fear and curiosity the families of a small village might experience when confronted by a stranger. Although the insects don't bite, Pandy runs into her home and brings out a foul-smelling root that she smears over my head and hair. With the odor signaling my rite-of-passage into their ranks, they move away to sit happily on the backs of the rats dozing on the forgotten tracks. In this symbiotic hell of the cryptozoa, the bugs live off the maggots that spontaneously appear in the garbage the rats leave behind; and although my fascination impoverishes my fear, there exists a dread far beneath the surface that has to do with Pandy and her comfort at my being here with her.

Halfway down the tracks I can see a bonfire being fed rags by a man with thick dreadlocks. Pandy tentatively explains that the groups of people I now begin to see around other bonfires strung along the edge of the pit as it curves to the left, would be outlawed up on the streets. The people in the nicer homes living within the cinder and mud igloos provide these people with food and necessities, even though the longer the outlaws remain, the less they desire anything but their own sludge-fires, their own conversation and a meal every so often.

For several moments there is silence between Pandy and me. Pandy moves from foot to foot restlessly. It is a graceful gesture. Her limbs sway to a silent chorus. Then:

"You shocked by where I live?"

"Is that what you want me to be? Is that why you live here?"

Her glow fades as I continue.

"Look, I know you don't have to live like this—that dress you wore last night cost more than a year's rent on my apartment. You have antiques in your mud hut. What kind of joke are you playing on yourself and the people who *have* to live here?"

Pandy spreads her hands out in all directions.

"Why shouldn't I live like this if they do?"

I am not amused by martyrs—their innocence a luxury I could never afford.

"Come on, we're going to have a talk. All you are is a mixed up kid."

But she stands her ground, narcotized though she is.

"But why? Why shouldn't I live like they do?"

She won't budge. I lose patience and shout.

"What about that baby in your belly?"

I grab her by the hand, expecting resistance, and find that she has gone limp. Her acquiescence to me seems total so I lead her back to her hut. The usual distance and tension the drugs maintain is gone, and within seconds it is as if she is dissembling from a drug reaction. It doesn't make sense. She enters a kind of reticent confusion, not wanting to submit or admit to anything, but allowing me to move her about.

She cries uncontrollably as I pack a few things and lock the door to her hut. I can't understand the words she is trying to form. Her lack of control is all so sudden. We take a subway back to my house and I hold her in the back of one of the cars. When I finally get to my apartment I stick her in the bathtub and her full stomach looks hard and mottled, as if her own flesh is all that can protect the jewel lying hidden inside. I consider shooting her up with an I.V. of valium and demerol, but the bath seems to be calming her down. She calls to me that she has to return to

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get her lamp, she never travels without it; and then she dopes herself. Finally I get her into my bed to rest.

She must have left after I went to buy food at the Ninth Avenue markets. When I come back and can't find her, I call Page. If I have to return to her hut, I don't want to go alone. I tell him to meet me at 125th and First, we can walk from there.

Page is drugged to a fine tuning and in complete control.

I don't have a landmark or a key so when I find the gratings, I start knocking. The silence beyond each padlock does not unnerve me. I walk five blocks and, like a machine programmed for solution, I keep knocking and screaming Pandy's name. Page follows me. We cross a patch that looks familiar. There is a stark sapling standing cold, new, out-of-place and memorable for its solitude—and the bricks some caretaker has built around it—in the middle of the path. I wait. I think I hear the tinny sound of a transistor radio.

Page sucks the wind through his teeth as I holler, the matches burning in my fist illuminating the ground around us and one of the padlocked grates. All at once the noise stops and the grate is thrown open so suddenly that the only thing I glimpse is a dark head as it descends some steps into a pit below. Words pierce the darkness.

"All right. All right. My baby is me."

I follow the screams down the steps, turning around three times to beckon Page to follow. He stands riveted to the clammy slab of cement, as if he is a watchdog bred in the bushes with the other wild dogs. He tells me to wait for him, but instead I continue into the deep black room at the bottom of the steps. I light another match and glance quickly around to get my bearings. The room is empty except for a sink like the one at Pandy's and a cot shoved up against the wall. The person who opened the door squats in the middle of the floor, cuddling what I presume to be an infant and screeching a lullaby in that high-pitched voice I mistook for a small radio.

The blanket swaddling the infant looks familiar. It takes a few minutes for my eyes to adjust to the lack of light, but gradually I can discern color and detail. An orange glow shines under the bottom and through the sides of the backdoor, stippling the mud floor around the woman. Pandy's neighbor holds a light brown child mottled from new birth. I feel very afraid. The neighbor is an old black-skinned woman with a goiter that hangs down to her breast where she is trying to suckle the child. The taunting shriek announces her insanity less vividly than the look in her eyes: "It's my baby see, it's my baby, please, you can't have my baby, my baby is me."

The old woman repeats the singsong over and over again. She pulls at the extra skin hanging from beneath her chin as the rhyme becomes a hymnal refrain. I step back and glance up to see if Page is still at the top of the stairs, but he has already slowly begun his descent. Obviously the sounds from below have both alerted and disoriented him. Like a night animal, once his eyes can make use of the available light, he adjusts to the situation. He sees my fear. In a guttural voice pitched against the noise of the old woman, he speaks to me.

"Get the fuck outta here. I'll stop her. Just get the fuck outta here!"

"Ask her about Pandy, please ask her."

Just as I speak I am whiplashed; it is as if the "God of Time" has decided to make me understand endlessness. For a person as godless as myself, and so dependent upon the finite, this particular sensation aggravates my worst fear. I hear Page from the twilight.

"If you don't get outta here, I'll walk right out and leave you *and* Pandy."

Page stalks the distance between this creature and myself with an exorbitant hatred toward me for getting him into the mess. Out of habit, he begins rolling up his sleeves. When he is certain that the poor woman is reasonably harmless, although unpredictable, he very calmly addresses himself to her.

"Por favor, dónde está su amiga Pandy?"

I hadn't heard the latin accent in her song. Page stares kindly and repeats his sentence. I try to focus.

"Por favor, dónde está su amiga Pandy?"

Without missing a beat or altering her expression, the old woman drops the baby and jumps back, hissing the words of the hymn in Spanish. I run to the baby and discover it is very recently stillborn. The goiter flaps as the old woman takes off around the room. When she races to her sink in the corner, sticking first one leg and then the other into the bowl, I run out the backdoor which leads to the tracks. Page follows. Without thinking, I run deep into the city behind the huts and stop when I feel safe. Page grabs me. My fever makes me a dangerous friend. It matches the heat of the sludge-fires warming the dreadlocked men.

"Cut it out. What's happening to you? We're on a mission. Don't go *saditty* on me now."

Page has reached far back into our parents' past. I stare at him. In the glow of a hundred different bonfires I fight the demon that is trying to terrorize me. Page doesn't respond to my stillness. He is watching something over my shoulder. I twist around so fast I am thrown off balance and fall. The palms of my hands touch a thin layer of mud before sinking with the weight of my body into the hideous rat food. The immediate impact of the odor makes me cry out, just as a voice above me begins to speak. Squatting there, arms thrown back for support, vulnerable to the dungeon and its recent tradition, I begin to weep.

The voice offers me a rag. I feel a need to be proper.

"Oh, thank you."

I stand up and peer into the face of a man who could have been the shadow with the thick dreadlocks I saw yesterday down near the main bonfire. He nods to me and watches peacefully as I primly clean off my hands. He repeats the words he has spoken before, and this time I hear what he means.

"She left you a note."

"What do you mean—left?"

"She's dead. Do you want me to take you to her?"

"How do you know who I am?"

"She said you would be coming. She expected you."

"What about the old woman? She's got Pandy's baby."

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"We'll take care of that here."

We follow the man through the tunnel, past clots of people, their yellow fire lighting our way and the activity of the nether world, past the old woman's screams, down to Pandy's house which I can now see is in a cul-de-sac where the direction of the old train track takes a sharp turn to the right. All of the houses on the same line with Pandy's have colorful flower pots filled with plastic flowers outside their doors. Page follows the rats with his eyes. He never stops and never asks a question. The bugs are clustered in halos over Page's head and my own. Page does not try to brush them away. He keeps his fists clenched and his arms free to swing. Pandy's backdoor is open. Inside, the single murphy bed is suspended halfway to the floor, swinging gently to the rock of the subway rumble. The springs and the legs are eaten away by rats. Earlier in the day Pandy told me that wherever she goes to stay she carries with her the bronze lamp given her by her grandmother. Here the piece is more a touch of art in a room made barren by deliberate poverty. The base is broad—and carved out in bronze, against the light shining through a red tiffany glass, is a small lady carrying a parasol as she descends a flight of steps into a Japanese garden. It is the little red light that now illuminates Pandy hanging in the center of the room. A gnarl of veins bulge through her needle-pocked skin like a blue worm reappearing in the nape of her neck, in her arms and in her legs. Even the femoral artery in her groin is swollen.

Page's nose begins to run as we three stand. Pandy's *commotion* is mostly over. The roar of a subway crossing town to head up to the Bronx echoes in another part of the catacombs. The immediate stillness is interrupted each time Page sniffs. I shake a little, never taking my eyes from Pandy and the homely afterbirth which hangs from her.

The man is the first to speak, and he speaks to Page.

"If you want to leave, I'll watch over your friend."

"No, there's no more either of us can do, I think we should both leave."

I have many things to do yet. "You leave. I have things to do here. Don't worry. I'm not frightened."

"I can't just leave you."

"Please. I'd rather. And besides," I gestured to our guide, "he'll make sure nothing happens."

Page nods to the man, walks up the cement steps with the keys to the padlocks the man has handed him, unclasps the lock to the metal door, then the one for the grating covering the door and throws the keys back down to me at the bottom of the steps and climbs out, leaving the door open, but closing the top grate. The man walks out the backdoor and stations himself next to it.

I close the door and look again at Pandy. I stand on the orange crate that has held the dead goldfish and lift Pandy out of her noose. I pull the bed down and lay her on it. Her pink sheets are covered with little rosebuds. Then, finally, I look at the note underneath the lamp. She bequeathed me her grandmother's lamp. She had believed we had a preordained connection so strong that the force of her death would make itself known to me through a means beyond logic and information. What kind of ritual execution had been in her mind I can only crudely imagine; however, she probably had made peace in her final bargain: if the baby survived, it was meant to and she had protected and nurtured it as far as she could; if the baby died, then it was meant to because her poison had already begun to enter it. Understanding this primitive gesture binds me to Pandy in a way she would have wanted. Yet seeing that she could go no further into motherhood than expectancy does not surprise me. The Dancing Machine could come to life for a night in the afterglow of medicine, but it could not share a life with her. She wouldn't have wanted it to become her language. She was alone. And she had chosen it that way.

Touched briefly by clarity earlier today, she had seemed to understand what her choices meant. While Pandy was taking her bath in my apartment, after she calmed down a bit, she began talking about things she had read back in the days when she kept books. I tried to encourage her to confide in me but before I could stop her she shot up right in the bathtub and what might have become an explanation turned into babble. Instead of speech she spoke in tongues made feathery by the legs of spiders she claimed to feel spilling and prancing through her veins. It was this frustration that precipitated my leaving for the market. Yet now as I stand next to her nearly alive body, I remember from the rubble of her monologue that there was an intaglio engraved upon her life; and that it is in a similar design to mine.

I ask the subway man to take me down to the old woman's home. He explains to her for me that she will have to give the baby back. That we have come for the baby. A group of people gather outside her door merely to overhear our conversation. They lean in to each other for comfort in the way old ladies might hold hands on the street. The woman hides in a corner and begins to sing the hymn again as she performs the ritual of wrapping the dead infant in the blanket, rolling the baby this way and that, murmuring her refrain until all of the blanket is tucked and folded around the infant. It is a boy. His little body stiffened into permanent innocence. I take him down to his mother's bed and fit him neatly inside the curve of her elbow.

I nod to the subway man and close the door to the rats, put the groceries Pandy bought earlier over my arm, pick up the lamp and climb the stairs. There is a picture of Stevie Wonder I hadn't noticed before, on the wall leading to the street. The photo is a familiar one—from the days when Yolanda beaded and wove his hair. Page is waiting near the little sapling down the mud from me. I slam the street door onto the darkness inside. We walk home. On Broadway a little gypsy girl comes up to us and offers Page a plastic rose. I cook dinner with Pandy's groceries and Page stays with me until I tell him to go. I put the lamp in the closet where my mother's blanket had been, and that is the end of it.

Page is in the hospital today. Watershedding. He decided two days ago. Last night I brought him here. He hadn't shot up for 36 hours and the pain was ripping his gut to hell. I went with him to the hospital and I'll see him again tomorrow after work. He'll be in a cell, screaming maybe, or perhaps silent. Then he'll get out. He's my homeboy. □

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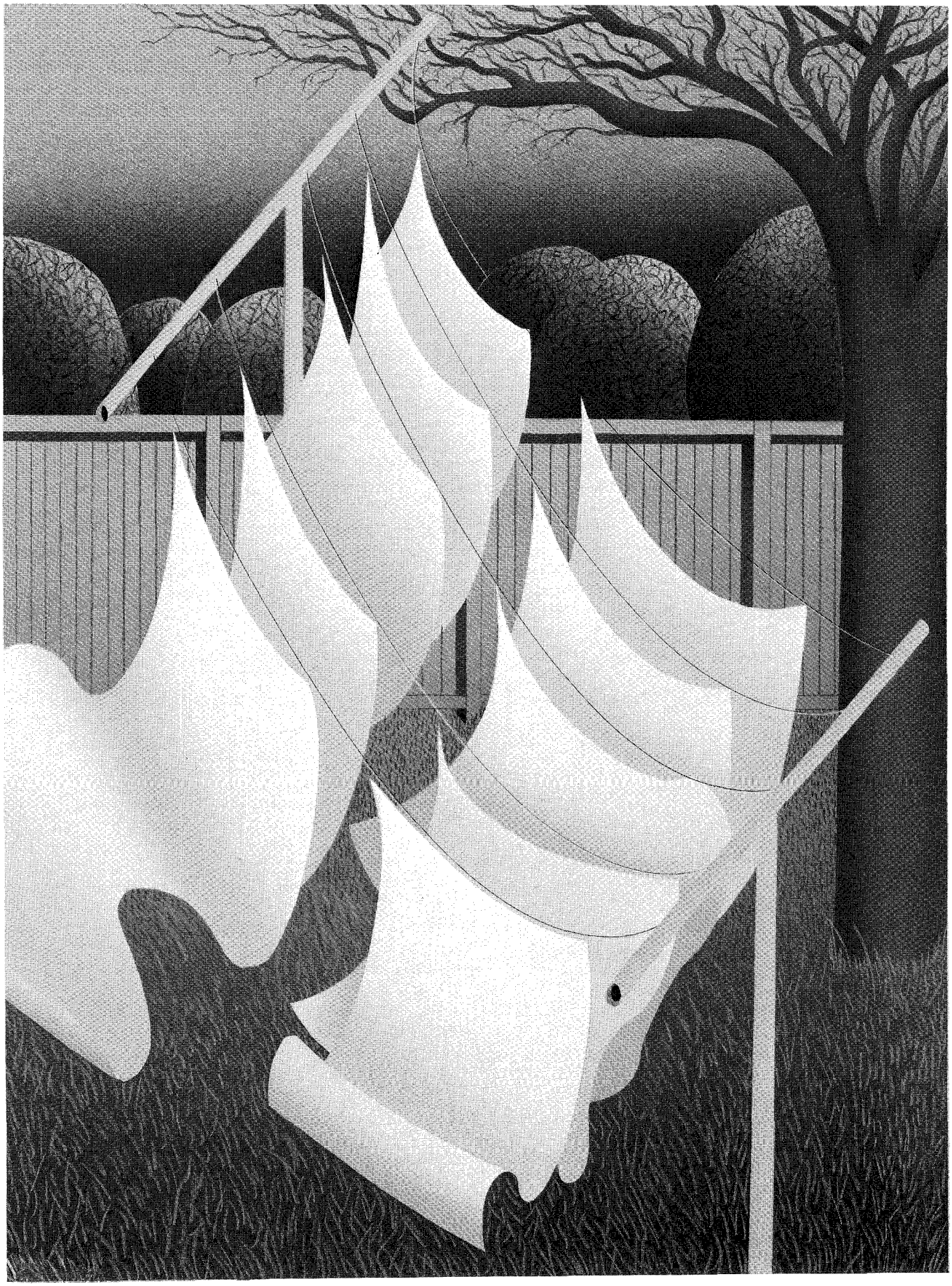

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BOATS COMING ASHORE

GARY GILDNER

The day that Mr. Russian rose at dawn and hauled his chinchilla hutches out to the alley, and stacked them up in a wall tall as he was, and then kicked it, the sky turned pearly blue; Grandpa Apichella, under his cherry tree, studied the delicate white blossoms floating close to his shoes; and up and down the alley, hanging out their wash . . . apron pockets filled with wooden pins, sheets popping in the wind . . . the neighbor women called to each other, *Oh, this is a day you are glad to see!*

To the boy, Frank, whose house stood between Mr. Russian's and Grandpa Apichella's, those sheets and shirts across the alley were flags and baseball fans—and as soon as he finished the dishes, he would perform for them. His ball and glove waited by the toaster; his cap was already on his head.

Meantime, Grandpa Apichella, clippers in hand, was giving long thought to a small blossomless twig on the cherry tree. Frank, at the kitchen sink, could see the old Italian measuring the twig from different angles, then finally, his mind made up, putting the clippers to it. When the twig fell, the old man jerked his skinny elbows and stepped quickly back, as if the twig were something alive and might come after him. Frank had to laugh.

Over the opposite way, he was surprised to see Mr. Russian. Mr. Russian usually worked on Saturdays, along with the other men in the neighborhood, at the Ford plant. He stood beside his chicken coop, hands on his hips, and glared toward the alley, leaning forward a little, his chin stuck out. (Frank had missed the hutches business earlier that morning, and he could not see them all stacked up because the garage—his and his mother's—blocked the view.)

Suddenly Mr. Russian shook his fist—and Frank had to laugh at him, too . . . at that hair leaping wild from his head like a bunch of thistles painted red. What was his neighbor worked up about now? The withered grape vines again? The vines hung on wires along the far side of the alley, and sometimes Frank saw Mr. Russian kick the vines no jam or wine would ever flower on—and hear him mutter, "The ground, by God, is sapped! And where's the little man!" Then he'd disappear inside his chicken coop, and pound on something with his hammer. If Frank was out playing ball, bouncing it off the garage, he pretended all the noise was the crowd in the stands.

Mr. Russian had stopped shaking his fist, and was regarding the chicken coop. Reaching up, he adjusted a hubcap that didn't hang straight with the others. Mr. Russian called his chicken coop The Wonder Shop. And on a day like today, Frank thought, you could see why! Its sides and roof were covered with more than a hundred hubcaps, and under the pearly sky, catching the sun full, it seemed to move in more than a hundred circles!

Dizzy in a happy way, the boy wiped off the kitchen counter top. At that moment Grandpa Apichella leaned a ladder against his cherry tree, the clippers fixed to his belt like a big wishbone.

Good-bye winter! Hello spring! sang the women up and down the alley, waving the wind from their hair. And Grandpa Apichella took a step, and another. Through his flowering limbs he saw what the boy would see later; he saw a ring of diapers; he saw a woman in the center of it flick her hair, and stretch both arms to the sky. He climbed higher.

When Frank emerged from his house and gained the bright yard, he stood still for a moment. Not really focusing on anything yet—not anything beyond what he was actually touching, that is. Just glad to be exactly where he was—standing on grass, smelling it, smelling the difference between indoors and out—and then he took a few steps, feeling the earth give a little, astonished at his presence on it.

It was a moment that passed soon enough—for it was no big thing, he surely would have said, embarrassed, had someone come along and asked what he was doing. (Though it was big enough to return to him years later, on a morning much like this one, when he sat so long in his driveway, holding his papers, that his wife finally came out and asked if anything was wrong.)

"Yo, Franklin! Come look here, yonder!" Mr. Russian called.

The boy went over to his neighbor's chicken coop, and looked to where the man's head nodded. They looked at the hutches together. That is, the man looked at hutches, the boy looked at a narrow wood wall (for the wire fronts of the hutches faced away from him, toward a line of laundry beyond).

"It's a pretty nice wall," the boy finally said, impressed.

"Rats!" said Mr. Russian, and led the boy into the alley for a closer look.

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When Frank had seen around to the other side, Mr. Russian said, "That's right—cages—from all them squirrely critters I used to keep in the cellar. That never made me one dime!" Rubbing the wood backs of the hutches, he said, "And look how clean my tongues-and-grooves fit." Mr. Russian shook his head at the waste of his carpentry.

The boy could just barely remember the chinchillas. They were a small piece of memory off in a corner of his head, where they chewed like rabbits. He and his mother had just moved into the neighborhood; before that, they lived with his grandmother—his father's mother—who had a bowl of wax fruit on her table; she told him he dasn't eat it. Trying, now, to remember more of the chinchillas, he could see his teethmarks in a wax pear. He could see the machine Mr. Russian invented that had a mechanical wood hand: the hand kept rubbing a chinchilla pelt nailed to a board. "Look," Mr. Russian had said, "it never wears out. Durable fur." And he pointed to his sign above the machine: DURABLE FUR. Frank could also see the bacon fat that somebody—his mother or his grandmother—saved in a can on the stove. As the sun struck the hubcaps, whirling, these pieces of memory flicked in and out of the boy's head.

"I am always either way ahead of the times or way behind," said Mr. Russian.

Frank turned his eyes away from the chicken coop, which was hard to look at for very long in the sun, and saw the clippers fall from the cherry tree, knocking off some blossoms on the way down. Then he noticed Grandpa Apichella among the branches. In his dark clothes, the old man reminded Frank of the silhouettes he'd made at school for Halloween.

Ah, he thought, Grandpa Apichella is trimming his tree. When a couple of branches began to flutter like wings, it did not occur to Frank that the old Italian was also stuck in the tree, shaking with fear. He thought the man was simply enjoying himself up there closer to the sky.

When the yelling began, however, Frank and Mr. Russian hurried over. But they could do nothing to help: trembling and angry, Grandpa Apichella would not budge from his perch. He looked down at them red-faced, working his jaws, clicking his teeth. He was a frightening—and pitiful—sight to the boy.

"Go fetch Mrs. Pillow," said Mr. Russian.

The boy ran to the Pillows' back door and knocked. Mrs. Pillow was the old Italian's granddaughter. Frank hoped she would not speak her other languages at him, as she did with people when she got excited. He remembered his mother's advice—to speak slowly. But when Mrs. Pillow appeared behind the screen, holding a soapy scrub brush, Frank could only point at the tree.

Mrs. Pillow blinked in that direction, and several times at the general sky. Was she looking for bombers? She had told Frank, more than once, how the bombers came and how, for years, she feared the sky. And once, without warning, she hugged him to her breast, saying, "Horrible . . . horrible . . ."

Standing in her back door, she did not see what the trouble was—but, a large woman with a brush in her hand, emerging into the yard now, called by a boy who could only point, she was ready for the worst. She saw her neighbor with his head in her tree. She went over and peered up. Then she looked at Mr. Russian, at the boy, then back up.

"My grandfa," she said with wonder, as if the wiry, red-faced man (whose false teeth had slipped off his gums a little as he looked straight down) was a strange wild thing escaped from the zoo.

Then her eyes glared, her lips burst, and she yelled a thick mixture of French and Italian at the red-faced man. She shook her brush at him as well, so that bubbles of soap landed like snow on the bark below his shoes. She began to cry.

Now, the old man's eyes glared too, hard. He removed his teeth and put them in his pocket, and yelled a thick mixture of French and Italian back at his granddaughter. When she stamped the ground, the boy could feel the ground move, and he was confused.

"He is in his eighty-two!" she screamed at Frank and Mr. Russian.

Reluctantly, Mr. Russian climbed the ladder, muttering to himself, "Be careful, Alvin." Level with the old man, he said, reaching out his hand, "Now just ease over here, Grandpop, and grab ahold." The other glanced at him once, wild-eyed, then poured out an even greater mixture of French and Italian at his granddaughter. She in turn yelled in French and Italian at Mr. Russian, rapping the ladder with her brush.

"Whoa, now! Don't do that!" he said. "You'll kill us all!" Then to the boy: "What's she want?"

Frank said he didn't know, and felt hollow.

"Glory be," said Mr. Russian. He climbed down and scratched in the wild red hair on his head. He said, "It's the wrong time for him to be pruning anyway."

Three or four women from across the alley came over, and gathered around Mrs. Pillow. One of them called the fire department. While they all waited, the granddaughter pressed her apron to her mouth. Mr. Russian muttered a story about a raccoon in a tree in Arkansas when he was a boy. Frank looked at the old man's black shoes laced up over his ankles (he had worn shoes like that once), and at his trembling knees, and finally had to look away.

The fire truck arrived and Grandpa Apichella was brought safely back to earth. A fireman on either side held him up by an arm, as if he really was a strange wild thing escaped from the zoo and everybody ought to have a look. The color had left his face; he seemed stunned. And his granddaughter softly moaned. Then his tongue began to make little lizardy motions between his dry lips; rasping noises presently issued from his throat, and his thin frame struggled to be free.

The firemen let him go. He found his teeth and quickly put them in. His color returned. He glared fiercely around. The firemen laughed, lit cigarettes, and left. But everyone else remained for a while. The women took the opportunity on a wonderful day, the first really nice day after a terrible winter, to have a visit. One of them was expecting; she rubbed her stomach, saying possible names. Mr. Russian picked up the clippers and studied them as if they were important. Frank sat on the

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bottom rung of the ladder, working the ball in the pocket of his glove, trying to concentrate on that. He hoped no one would look at him, for he felt strange. He felt—almost—that *he* had been up in the tree.

Grandpa Apichella sulked. He refused his granddaughter's hands, which wanted to touch him. He would have nothing to do with any of them. He removed himself to a corner of the yard, where he found a pile of twigs to look over, and pick at, and decide about.

Many years later, on a Sunday in early fall, Frank knocked on the Pillows' front door. Mrs. Pillow and her husband, Stan, didn't recognize him right away. He was so thin! she said. Frank said he was back in Detroit on business, and thought he would visit the old neighborhood.

"By gosh," Stan said, "it's been a long time."

"Almost thirty years," Frank said.

"No!"

At the kitchen table, Frank showed them pictures of his son and daughter, of his wife, of their California home. He had a picture of his mother too, in front of the bungalow he had bought for her out there. The Pillows praised everyone and everything—and those roses! Yes, Frank said, they were all doing fine in South Pasadena. She and Stan, he said, must come visit them.

Mrs. Pillow brought a fresh coffee cake from the oven. She said now that Stan was retired, they were planning a trip to France. Remember, she said, we were married there! They planned to visit Poland too, where Stan's family originally came from, and Italy, where she still had cousins.

"As soon as I get everything done around here," said Stan.

"What everything?" his wife wanted to know.

Stan laughed. "I work harder now than when I worked!"

Frank thought to ask about Grandpa Apichella—whose last years he and his mother had not been there for—but that was so long ago he didn't quite know how to phrase his question. And it was much too late to say he was sorry he had missed the funeral. So he asked about Mr. Russian.

Stan said he retired, oh, three or four years ago, and returned to Arkansas. Stan grinned wide. Alvin, he said, bought this old black hearse from the Savage Brothers Funeral Home, loaded up all of his crazy hubcaps, and drove off.

"That crazy hair!" said Mrs. Pillow.

"He looked like a man with pies for sale," Stan laughed.

"Poof!" said Mrs. Pillow. "He was gone, like that."

"The new people," Stan said, "painted that crazy chicken coop, painted everything, nice."

Frank asked if Mrs. Pillow remembered the day her grandfather climbed the cherry tree.

"Oh, but of course," she said. "It was so cold! Snow—everywhere! We were freezing! And to eat we had this"—she held out her palms—"poof!"

Frank said nothing. Surely Stan, even though he was at work that day, would recall the weather among the details he must have heard later. But Frank did not want to contradict her. He himself knew what kind of a day it was—and could see it now, clear as anything, that pearly blue sky, those white blossoms that smelled so sweet.

The Pillows invited him to eat with them. He wanted to—he really did—what *was* his hurry?—but he heard himself say he had all this work he had to finish before tomorrow.

"On Sunday?" they said.

"It's a crazy business," he said. "Paper work and more paper work." It was true, of course.

"Not like the factory," Stan laughed.

"Let me give you some tomatoes at least," Mrs. Pillow said. "I have suddenly so many!" She led them outside, to her garden.

In the back yard, Frank was struck by how tidy everything was—the swept lawn, the garden with its neat border of marigolds. Even over in his old back yard, where a new double garage now stood, and, beside it, a motorboat on a trailer—both garage and boat creamy white—everything was carefully placed, arranged, shining. And beyond his yard, the chicken coop—The Wonder Shop—painted a brilliant red . . . so shiny it was hard to look at. Did he really live here once? Frank looked down; his shoes on the rich grass—they too shone—like objects carved from beautiful wood, from mahogany. For a moment he felt like a man who had always worn wingtip shoes and a herringbone suit, who had never lived anywhere except South Pasadena. Where his wife grew roses and kissed his cheek when he came home from work. Where his son played baseball, and where his daughter in a long white gown went off to the prom with a boy who smiled perfect teeth. Then Frank remembered the chinchilla hutches, throwing his ball against the good wall they made . . . throwing and scooping up the rebound, learning to field grounders. His ambition was to be a shortstop because—what an ancient memory this was!—because his father had been a shortstop, his mother said. Frank did not remember him—only the photograph she kept on a doily, showing a sailor with a big grin. But he remembered Mr. Russian beside the chicken coop, waving his arms, pretending to throw and catch, declaring that Frank could cover territory no one dared! And he remembered Grandpa Apichella standing under his cherry tree, the blossoms floating around his shoes like stars . . . like little boats coming ashore.

He looked up. He was not stunned exactly, but very surprised. He said, "Your cherry tree is gone."

Stan Pillow laughed, his arms full of the tomatoes his wife was picking and handing to him. "I cut it down," he said. "It was a mess. Wasn't that tree a mess?" he said to his wife.

She stood up with two big zucchini and a pumpkin.

"What tree?"

"Grandpa's tree."

"Bah!" she said. "Only those few small fruits. And so bitter! Here," she laughed, thrusting the pumpkin at Frank. "Have your wife make a pie from this! This is much better!"

"And for Halloween," said Stan, "you can make a big happy face. And put it in your window!" □

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Truth on the Back Roads

SCOTT RUSSELL SANDERS

Walking toward the barricaded entrance of Indian Hill Mill—a ramshackle place on Clear Creek southwest of Bloomington, Indiana—I was confronted by a tom turkey. Feathers boastfully erect, wattles bright red, great forked feet stamping the dust, he looked formidable enough to carve up a farmer for Thanksgiving. Although brought up in the country, I wondered for an instant if turkeys were really as harmless as people always claimed. Of course, of course, I reminded myself: turkeys are chicken. Whereupon Mr. Turkey threw back his head and let loose a bloodcurdling gobble, a sound straight out of the brain's nightmare basement, and I flinched a giant step backwards. As if this cry had alerted the kingdom of poultry, I was quickly surrounded by a throng of geese, ducks, guinea hens, and chickens, each gabbling its own birdy dialect.

This squawky armada accompanied me uphill, gathering recruits as I climbed toward a red-and-white pole barn. I was guessing that whoever owned these birds might be working there, and might give me permission to snoop around the ruined stone mill. Two pickups sat out front of the barn, one of them with the snout end charred black and the windshield shattered as if from an explosion, the other looking as scraped and banged-up as a tank after a tour of duty. Also out front were chicken runs, rabbit hutches, the carcasses of dismantled machines, snow tires, a burst hydrogen tank (also fire-blackened), buckets, feeding dishes, deflated sacks, and a folding chair for catching the breeze. From the barn's open doorway, which was nearly filled by a Coachman trailer, came the English accent of a BBC reporter describing a riot in Sri Lanka.

The poultry announced my arrival in several languages. The man who emerged from the barn to see about the racket seemed no more likely, on this back road, than the British radio broadcast. His beaming face looked as if it had been scrubbed clean of doubt by decades of meditation. The untied laces of his tennis shoes flopped in the dirt as he approached. He wore, aside from the sneakers, only white shorts and a stealthy grin. Glimpsed across a poker table, such a grin might lead you to despair. Matching rugs of gray hair, thick and short, covered his chest and head.

When I asked him if I could look around Indian Hill Mill, he scratched the mat on his chest and said, "You can dance in there, if you want to, so long as you remember that I never saw or heard of you. I don't know you're here. You understand?"

I understood. But I was too intrigued by this gatekeeper to leave immediately for the mill. On the radio a Mozart string quartet followed the BBC news. The turkey and chickens and ducks and geese encircled us like an expectant audience at a theater-in-the-round. I gave my name; he kept his. The look he beamed at me suggested that he knew a murderous secret—a bomb was planted in my car, a snake was breathing at my ankle—but had no intention of telling.

"Did you ever work in the mill?" I said.

"Nope."

"You farm?"

"Nope."

"You repair cars in there?"

"Nope."

I looked around for a more fruitful topic. "That's quite a turkey."

"Yep."

The bristly bird, inflated by a sense of his own dignity, swelled even more. His wattles turned from crimson to blue.

"What's that change in color mean?" I asked.

The man rubbed a palm across the gray rug on his head. "It has to do with the circulation of blood. But what it means is anybody's guess."

"Do you sell poultry?"

"I just raise them, the good-for-nothings. Gid-out!" he yelled, brandishing a sneakered foot as if to kick. The birds strutted nervously, flapping and scrawking, then resumed their watch. Repenting, he lifted a branch next to the burnt-out pickup to show me a gaggle of newborn ducklings. "They're French. Grade-A fancy." He let the branch fall and turned his sly grin on me. "What the hell are you after, anyway?"

"Well," I said, "I'm interested in work."

"A job?"

"No, no. I'm curious about the work other people do, and the places where they do it."

He squinted at me. "Nosy, aren't you? I bet you're just dying to know what I'm doing way out here beside a run-down stone mill in the middle of nowhere, aren't you? Aren't you now? Well, I'll tell you." His eyes, never fully open, now clammed almost shut. "I make mountain dew."

During my rambles, I had run into scalawags of various descrip-

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tions, but not, as yet, a moonshiner. "Mountain dew?"

"Come have a look." He waved me toward the barn.

Only the turkey, boldest of the birds, followed us inside. Next to the Coachman trailer stood a refrigerator, a table, and a stove, all hospital white. "I sleep in the coach and eat out here. Pretty tidy arrangement, wouldn't you say?" Pipes and hoses, covered by loose boards, passed under the walkway. The turkey's great splayed feet jounced the planks as he tottered after us. My guide halted at the stove, opened the oven door, and with a sweeping bow said, "Climb on in, Tom." The turkey jerked its head up and swung around and beat a hasty retreat into the sunshine, rattling the boards as he went.

"He's no fool," said the bird man. Beyond the stove, he drew aside a curtain and revealed a clicking, oozing, percolating laboratory that might have been a leftover set from a late-night movie. Red lights blinked. Liquid bubbled through glass tubes. Tall cylinders of concrete and steel, stirred at the top by electric motors, spewed thunderheads of steam. "Reactors," he told me. A gauge on the nearest one read 420 degrees centigrade. The air above our heads was criss-crossed by pipes and wires, the walls were encrusted with switches and relays and valves, the benches were obscured by glassy-eyed monitors: it was a plumber's and electrician's nirvana.

"I built every piece of this myself. Twice, in fact, because my first lab burned down a year ago."

"Did something overheat?"

"Only tempers. Some boys who'd been renting the old Indian Hill office got mad when I discovered their marijuana growing behind the mill in my blackberry patch. I could just see the sheriff stumbling onto that and paying me a visit. So I cut it down. A few days after that I went to check the mailbox, and before you know it here came those boys peeling by me, throwing gravel, and when I got back up here they had fires set in three places." This explained the charred truck and the burst hydrogen tank out front. All he had managed to save from that first lab were a few cylinders of butane, which he rolled away from the flames while a volunteer fireman doused him with a hose. "That was a little hairy. I wouldn't want to do that for a living." After the fire he thought about giving up and going fishing. But eventually, to avoid boredom, he rebuilt.

"Do you want to see my product?" From a desk littered with calculators, timers, logbooks, and twitching meters, he picked up, not a bottle, but a manila folder. Opening it, he showed me a curving graph. "Paper, that's what I sell. That's what I make out here in the middle of nowhere—inkmarks on paper." (As a writer, I recognized the improbability of that.) Not a moonshiner after all, he was an organic chemist. On a notepad he began drawing molecules—benzene, butane, a flock of polymers—and writing formulas, all by way of explaining that he tested catalysts for use in the manufacture of marine resins.

I peered at the inky cobwebs, trying to recall enough of college chemistry to make sense of them.

"It may not look like much to you," the chemist said, "but right there is a little scrap of what God had in mind when He made the universe."

"Could I keep it?" I said, reaching for the paper.

"Secret, I'm afraid." He quickly folded the sheet and stuffed it in his pocket.

At every stage in our tour through his lab he seemed, like his turkey, at once boastful and skittery. I discovered at least part of the reason when he told me about his background. Born and reared in Indiana, he had worked as a chemist all over the country. He held thirty-eight patents through various companies. When a firm he worked for in Texas was bought by a Japanese outfit, he was pensioned off and forced to sign an agreement that he would not pursue his research on catalysts for anybody else. "So I came home to set up my lab in Indiana, where I figured they wouldn't care much about Texas contracts." Cautious, he was only selling his results abroad, to companies in Germany, Switzerland, and France.

"But why did you settle just here, beside a stone mill?" I asked.

The chemist reflected on that. "I suppose because there's still a rich feel of men and machines around this place, a hum of work in the air."

Inside the twilit cavern of Indian Hill Mill, the dirt floor still held the footprints of stone men, interlaced by the meandering tracks of possums and raccoons. Shut down only ten years earlier, the building looked as though it had been neglected for a long while before that. Great swatches of clapboard had been torn from the steel frame. Patches of sky showed through the roof. Bushes and nodding weeds and head-high trees grew in the puddles of sunlight. Honeysuckle and poison ivy fingered in through broken windows. A scooped-out stone held the bones of a small kill—snouty skull, hooked canines, curving spine. On the walls electrical boxes gaped like giant clams, their knife switches corroded open. Much of the machinery had been sold for scrap, but the gang saws, a few planers, and a diamond saw remained, tinged all the colors of sunset, like engines rusting in a drowned ship.

Limestone blocks, half sliced, had been left in the gang saws when the men quit work on that last day. Wooden triangles wedged them in place, to make sure the cuts would be true. A pair of overshoes touched noses beside the sandpit. A flannel shirt draped over the arm of a sawyer's chair. Plastered across an engine housing, a sticker from a local gun shop advised: TAKE YOUR BOY HUNTING INSTEAD OF HUNTING YOUR BOY. (When that sticker was put up, many sons were fighting strangers in the jungles of Vietnam, and some were fighting policemen in the streets of America.)

The feel of vanished men was strongest in the blacksmith shop: battered forge, drill press stripped back to the dumb chassis, broken drive belts curled on the floor like sleeping pythons, barrels full of bolts as thick as a baby's wrist, buckets and wooden crates and sagging file drawers crammed with parts, gloves scattered on the floor like discarded hands. A newspaper of August 12, 1974, lay open across a stool: BENCH DRIVES IN FIVE AS REDS MAUL METS. The wooden doors of a tool cabinet, its handles made of welded chain, were twin palimpsests, scrawled over with calculations in red crayon and black pencil. Screwed to the inside of one door, tilted so as to reflect the mug of a mechanic, was a car's circular rear-view mirror.

Altogether I found six mirrors hidden away in the recesses of Indian Hill Mill, most of them jagged shards, held in place by wires or bent nails. I thought about the men at day's end blowing dust from their clothes with air hoses, smacking dust from their caps, thumbing dust from

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their eyes, stooping down to watch themselves in cracked mirrors, raking wet combs through their hair.

Every inch of the mill made me ache with a sense of the dispersion of knowledge, skills, and life-ways. All the while, outside, the chemist's poultry creaked and croaked like rusty pumps.

The bird that greeted me out front of Bob Thrasher's house, five miles west of Harrodsburg on Popcorn Road, was a magisterial goose. Less than a fourth the size of tom turkey, it was twice as bold. Honking, wing-flapping, nipping at the red laces of my boots, it herded me toward Bob Thrasher, who sat in a wheel chair in the shade of a tulip tree. He was a tight-muscled man of sixty with a flap of brown hair and a sunbaked outdoor face. The inward sag of his mouth and the squint in his blind right eye gave him a crooked smile, as if he were bitterly amused by the world's antics. His right leg, crushed three months earlier under the wheel of his tractor, was propped on a stool. That pant leg was cut off at mid-thigh and his foot was bare. As I sat down to share the tulip-tree shade with him, he was rubbing the swollen knee.

"You ought to see it in the X-rays," he said. "It looks about like a junkyard in there."

He numbered the breaks for me, from ankle to hip. After the tractor had passed over him, he had dragged himself to the edge of the field and lay panting, in and out of consciousness, for thirteen hours, until a neighbor found him. "I got no business being alive. I've done so many fool things in my life, I'm overdue. I tell you I did wonder, laying there, if this was my time come at last."

I had talked with him before the accident, about his work in the mills and about growing up in a stone family, but this was my first visit since his return from hospital. Before, his talk had crackled with the fires of irreverence. How would it be today, when he was in constant pain, when he faced the prospect of never again being able to walk?

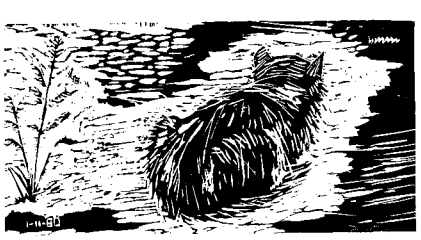
"All busted up like this I can't do anything but read books and talk. Lord, the things that need doing! I must have twenty miles of fencing, and half of it's crying for work. I've been having to read my cows a legal description of the property to keep them up. And you know how dumb cows are. They don't pay me any mind. And do you know why cows are dumb? Why haven't animals taken over the world? I'll tell you. What do you do when you get a smart cow, one that can open a gate, say, or get into your feed? Do you keep her? Nossir. You butcher her, is what you do, and you breed the dumb ones. It's downward evolution."

The goose, at least, had a mind of its own. Having untied my boots, it was nibbling at the seam on my blue-jeans, working up toward the knee, and no amount of shooing would deter it.

"My son finished getting in the corn," said Thrasher, "and his wife mowed my clover for me."

The corn, higher than our heads now in August, reared a wall of green between us and the road. The second growth of clover was already tall enough to hide a cat. In fact it did hide a cat, a gray veteran that slouched toward us with a field mouse drooping from its chops like a handlebar moustache. The front yard was a highway for pets: in addition to the goose and cat our visitors included three ducks, four chickens, and a galumphy black dog. Had the fences been as bad as Thrasher claimed, we would have been visited by saddle horses and beef cattle as well. Their pastures rolled away behind the house; beyond the pastures lay woods and fallow fields. Thrasher's five hundred acres stretched more than a mile in from Popcorn Road, stretched all the way to his father's place on the next road to the north, a road named Thrasher.

As far back as anybody could remember, the Thrashers had farmed in the vicinity of Harrodsburg. "My father was the first one who couldn't make a living at it. I can shut my eyes and see him going off to work in the mills when I was only a toddling boy. I must have been four or five years old, which would make it about 1928, 1929. Stone opened up all around here. Quarriers walked past our gate coming and going, lugging their lunch pails. When they stoked up the channelers first thing in the morning, the smoke



was so thick you couldn't hardly see to walk down the road."

By the early 'thirties, work in the stone belt grew scarce. The unions lost their leverage. Men hungry for any sort of a job would sit around the lip of a quarry hole, waiting for somebody down there to make a slip. If a quarrier got hurt or mouthed off, the foreman would send him packing and crook his finger at one of the watchers. There was no insurance, no pension, no sick leave. If you could move, you worked. If you missed a day, no matter why, you lost your pay. Fortunes were made and mansions built out of the gristle and ache of men like Thrasher's father. Recalling those days, Thrasher simmered with a wry anger.

"There was a few families with money, the owners, and there was a whole lot of end-of-a-mud-road families like mine. The money folks didn't know the first thing about us, and we didn't care much about them. Most of them saw us as a bunch of ragtags, one the same as another, like a hammer you pick up and use awhile and then lay down."

Being ragtag and poor, shy on book knowledge and little traveled, the stone men were not very tolerant of outsiders, a category which included people with dark skin and foreign accents. Thrasher could remember hearing, as a boy, about the fiery threats and ghostly shenanigans of the Ku Klux Klan, and about a vigilante gang called the white-cappers, who dragged men they did not approve into the woods and beat them by way of instruction. (Older stone men had told me about seeing crosses flame in the town parks of southern Indiana, and on the lawns of families who broke the unwritten code.) Italians and Germans, often imported as strike-breakers, were given a hard time in the mills. Blacks were given a hard time everywhere.

Thrasher also remembered listening, as a boy, when his father stopped at the gate after a day in the mill and shot the breeze with the other stone men. "But Dad never wasted his joking on me. With me it was always work, work, work. From about October until spring, every weekend I lived on the end of a crosscut saw. I hated that. I flat *hated* that. But my dad farmed and worked in the mills all summer, so we had to get in our wood in the winter. Since he didn't quit until after dark, I had the

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job of going to hunt the cows. We didn't feed them nothing when we milked them. Just milked them, you know, and turned them out. So naturally they'd go hide. We had bells on them, but they'd stand just as still, like a field full of statues. They'd go as far from the barn as they could get, and I'd hunt for them in the dark, barefoot, stickers and thorns everywhere. Finally I'd hear a tinkle, and find them. I trained a red polled cow to let me ride her back to the barn."

Thrasher himself started farming at sixteen, went to fight Hitler at eighteen, came home, numbed and searching, at twenty-two. "I was a scout in Europe, which is like being a duck in a shooting gallery. My buddies got killed right and left. For a long time after I got back, everybody I knew my age was dead. It was like I was stealing from them, just being alive. I felt awful. I'm not sure I ever did get over that."

Married, with a child coming, he worked for a while at the General Motors foundry in Bedford, but never liked it, despite the good pay, because it was too regimented, too rush-rush, too much of a head-bobbing and order-barking place—too much like the army. As soon as a job turned up in the mills, he took it, and stayed around stone for the next ten years, running a diamond saw and a split-face machine, hooking for the crane, driving a truck and a forklift, anything and everything. "There was an ease to it that I liked. If there was heavy work to do, you worked hard; if it slacked off, you told stories or shot craps or put up your feet and read." Running a diamond saw in the evenings, he plowed through biographies, histories, novels, and all sixty-six books of the Bible while the circular blade plowed through stone.

"It wasn't all sweetness and light. We were an ornery bunch. We'd put loose bolts on the railroad tracks and stand back to watch the boys on the flatbed cars go thump-thump-thump, jouncing over them. We had this foreman, Henry Brunner. He was a religious man, wouldn't cuss no matter what. So we'd do everything we could think of to put old Henry's religion under a strain. Like we had this one-hole crapper in the woods. Stank so bad I wouldn't go in it unless I was desperate. But there was this one guy who'd just *live* in there, instead of working. Well, one day we set it afire with him in it, to smoke him out. There was so much wet paper in the

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pit, the crapper burnt for three days. Old Henry, he just hopped in a big circle around the fire, yelling, 'Mercy, mercy!'

"And there was this guy, Clyde, drove one of the big tractors. We didn't like him. Had his nose in the air. One night we took and unbolted the plate from under the motor on his tractor, put a dead cat inside, then bolted the plate back on. Next day, as soon as Clyde got his engine all hot, it started to stinking. There he sat, sniffing, and couldn't figure out where the stink was coming from. Henry Brunner hollered, 'My goodness, it's terrible, it's horrible, what on earth are we going to do?'

"Another time we had this boy, half crazy, he'd park his car in the same spot every day, under a big tree. Soon as the whistle blew at 3:30 he'd run jump in his car and gun the motor and peel gravel leaving the place. So one lunch time we took and tied a fifty-foot length of cable round that tree and onto the frame of his car. When the whistle blew and he jumped in we all looked kind of sideways at him. He went peeling off, as usual, for fifty feet, and then he stopped all sudden and nearly banged through the windshield. Henry Brunner came hopping and yelled, 'Sakes alive! You bout to murdered the boy!' That was the sort of pranks we used to think was funny."

Except for a knife of pain in his knee, which clamped Thrasher's mouth shut every now and again, only the need for air interrupted his stories. I listened with pleasure to the turns of his sentences. The goose snipped at the brads on my hip pockets. Dog and cat and ducks and the rest of the menagerie waddled or loped or clucked past our chairs.

"The owners didn't waste any money on us," Thrasher said after the knee eased up on him. "Like on heat, for instance. In the winter, you'd turn on the radio first thing in the morning to see what the temperature was. If it was above eighteen degrees, you'd go to work; if it was below, you'd stay home. Not for our sake, you understand, but for the sake of the stone. The thing was, if it fell colder than eighteen degrees, the pieces would stick together.

"But the owners weren't all skinflints and stuffed shirts. Some of them would treat you like a human being, almost like an equal. I remember I worked in a mill that belonged to this old coot, Daddy Beck. I was outside, one beautiful morning in the fall, loading split-face, and Daddy Beck drove by in his big old Buick and called out to me, 'A day like this makes you glad to be alive, don't it?' And I knew just what he was feeling. That was about as good as it ever got between us and the owners."

Pain was no novelty for Thrasher. His right eye, puckered nearly shut, had been blinded at the mill when a piece of strapping broke and raked across the cornea. The nails on his propped-up foot were yellow and thick from having been mashed hundreds of times by dropped tools and rocks. The skin of his hands was embroidered with scars.

"What I liked about the mills was the independent sort of men who worked there. All of them had something else they could do—farming, carpentry, plumbing, fixing cars—so they could afford to be cantankerous. They didn't turn sour when they got laid off. We'd all go on strike pretty regular. If it looked like it'd be a long one, I'd just plant more corn."

By 1961, when Thrasher had four children in university and a hefty mortgage, the lay-offs and low pay—"I'd work every day I could, maybe twenty-five weeks a year, and earn $3000"—forced him to leave the mills and get a cushier job. He moved to the post office. There he stayed until his accident. Nearly a quarter century of working in an office, most recently as assistant postmaster, had not increased his regard for paper shuffling. "The way it is with most jobs today, it don't matter a whole lot if people even show up for work. If ninety percent of the people was to stay home tomorrow, it wouldn't make much difference. Where the world's headed, if you ask me, is everybody standing around a Xerox machine with a cup of coffee in their hands, waiting their turn in line, and somewhere there's an old guy raising a zucchini or something to keep them fed."

Clasping both hands under his junkyard knee, he shifted his leg on the stool. You could estimate the number of breaks by counting the grimace lines on his face.

"That's why I always come back to farming," he went on. "With farming, you know when you do something it really matters. If you don't do it, nobody else is going to do it for you." He stared at the knee, silent a moment, then added: "Except maybe one of your kids will help you out when you're banged up, or your wife, or your daughters-in-law, or your dad." His father, eighty-five, was still farming. Running a dairy herd for thirty years, he'd only missed one milking. "He could still paint a flagpole if he wanted to."

I wondered if Thrasher himself would ever again climb out of that wheelchair to drive a tractor or mend a fence. The land sloping away from us in all directions bore the marks of his labor, and he bore the marks of the land. He had built the house of frame and brick, the barns, the tractor shed, had planted the tulip tree we were sitting under, had pruned the woodlots, seeded the pastures, nursed the topsoil. He'd chosen this parcel of land to farm because his father, back in the dirtpoor days, had rented it from a well-to-do man in town. "When I was a boy my dream was to buy this place, because my dad worked on it so hard without owning it."

The farm straddled two townships, Clear Creek and Indian Creek. Thrasher's wife was trustee for one of them, his son for the other. "Around here that means something. Township trustee is a harder-fought election than President or Senator. It's neighbors voting on neighbors." The same neighbors had elected Thrasher to the county school board over and over, for eight years. They'd called him a Communist when he joined one of the first delegations to visit China after the Nixon thaw. Their puzzlement about him had only deepened when several emissaries from China made their way out Popcorn Road to have a look at his farm. (One of these visitors, a journalist, wrote a story about Comrade Bob that was read by several hundred million Chinese.) Baffled by this man who read thick books and cultivated corn, who milled stone and traveled around the world, who spoke sometimes like an end-of-a-mud-road hick and sometimes like a white-collar gent from town, the neighbors called him an intellectual peasant.

It was time to go. I could hear the pots of dinner clanging in the kitchen. The goose was feasting on my ankles. Thrasher's face sagged from pain and memory. I ruffled shut the leaves of my notepad. He glanced at it, yellow sheets smeared with ink. "I oughtn't to be telling you all this," he said, "but it's only the truth." □

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Birdwatching: An Initiation

BRUCE BERGER

Despite the example of Audubon, who shot thousands of the birds he so lovingly committed to paint, birdwatching has had an air of ethereality, of soft-heartedness, of passivity a little suspect in our democracy on the make. I knew this even in the sixth grade, when I ordered a bird caller from a novelty catalogue. That was the year birds leapt into view, and I opened the small brown package a little breathlessly. Inside was a clever metallic plug attached to a thumb ring and fitting in a red wooden peg, so that when the metal was twisted in the wood it chittered vaguely like a finch. I rushed outside and tried it. Nothing flew to my side, nor did the cry sound like anything in suburban Chicago, but I would be patient and explore the neighborhood.

As soon as I left our property I felt like a fugitive. What would I say if an adult or larger child asked me what I was doing with field glasses and a bird caller when all the other young men were at football scrimmage? I slunk through the alleys, hid behind lilacs and twisted the thumb ring. If I was heard and not seen I would be taken for a bird. When I thought of encountering humanity my cheeks burned and my heart pounded. If I wanted to chase birds, I thought logically, whose business was it? I would act as if it were perfectly average. But I knew it wasn't. A little boy birdwatcher would be jeered at, perhaps beaten up, and I wanted desperately to be like everyone else.

Much as I loved my red and silver bird caller, the birds didn't, and when my slinks were all potential embarrassment and no birds, I kept my hobby at home. I made a small wooden feeder in manual training, suspended it outside my window, and stocked it with the pet shop mix. Next to it I hung a board with wires to impale a severed orange, and inside the room I positioned a camera with a cable so that I could stand just out of sight, behind a floor lamp, and snap whatever came. The oriole and grosbeak shots were impressive. But the local diversity—cardinals, grosbeaks, orioles, blue jays, and scores of clamorous little sparrows—was soon exhausted, and months passed without novelty. Worst of all, the blue jays would swoop in screeching at first light, prop sunflower seeds edgewise between their claws and jackhammer them open before even I, always first up, was awake. My passion for birds lasted a year.

Free of adolescence and suburbia, I felt secure—even powerful—with bird book and binoculars. The emergence of the environmental movement had elevated birdwatching to a metaphor for sentimental interference with the goose-step of progress. Birdwatchers were those bleeders who could magically stop highways, de-authorize dams, and fell power plants with a smart remark at a hearing or a note to a congressman. Yet through high school, college, and years of post-graduate drifting, I recall only the mildest interest in actual birds. I was proud to be a birdwatcher by repute, but I seldom looked up.

It wasn't until I had a house of my own that I dutifully bought a *Peterson's Guide* and hung up a feeder. But a more serious birder next door put out a spread that included tins of peanut butter and suet in wire cages, inheriting strays hundreds of miles off course, while my Audubon seed tube drew the usual leftover sparrows. After the death of my German shepherd, stray cats invaded the yard, hid in the shrubbery, waited for birds to clean up the seeds that fell to the ground, then struck. Dogs, I realized, were unwitting protectors of birds. Since there was no way to persuade a condominium full of cat lovers to restrain or bell their beloved killers, and since my dogless feeder had become a death trap, I gave up.

But that adult year of feeding sparrows reactivated my childhood fever. Birds took roost in my psyche. Those descendants of flying lizards, those twists of the spectrum, those mobilized jewels, represented the most ferocious visible compaction of sheer life. The mere fact of them was stunning. I bought other bird books, more powerful binoculars. Walking or driving, my eye followed everything in flight. A mere awareness of birds infused a day with microscopic adventures. Driving through open country and spotting a raptor, I would slam the brakes, pull over and grab the glasses, and I have considered ordering a bumper sticker that says, I STOP FOR HAWKS. Journal entries, increasingly, were of birds. A few:

September 23, 1978

Drilling Chopin at the upright piano, which walls off sight of all but itself, I became aware of an accompaniment like sleighbells. The mountain ash outside the window, sagging with orange berries, had burst into frantic, ravenous birds, half of them pale green, the other half pink above and brown below. Emissaries from the sun? The bird book showed them to be pine grosbeaks, transients I was unaware of.

October 3, 1978

Birds seem so exempt from gravity, so composed of air itself, that there is a perverse appeal to any species that shows its bulk. Whenever a magpie lands on the scrub oak outside my window, the usual domain of warblers and sparrows, something in my own bulk responds. At first the magpie seems too big for reality, like a puppeteer after his tiny show. As if doing a warbler impression, the huge bird moves nimbly through the leaves, occasional bits of green flashing from his mouth. And every time he changes perch, giving a little boost with both feet and a half-flap of the wings, the branch he lights on is set thrashing up and down, its whole sector of leaves in an uproar. In the course of ravenous feeding, advancing in jerks and darts, plotting his way

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with hard shiny eyes, the magpie finally animates the whole tree. Gravity may be democratic, tugging evenly on us all, but it is the bulky bird, seeming too large for the vegetable world that trembles beneath it, that makes you feel in your bones the wistfulness of flight.

October 16, 1978

We prepared to camp on a high plateau in Utah, a land almost clean of birds, when a complicated call floated from some far ponderosas. I grabbed the binoculars and began stalking. There was something about the pattern, a kind of double loop that returned to the same note, that reminded me of the symbol for infinity, or perhaps a Möbius strip. As the call got louder and still eluded me, I became more excited. At last I spotted the source on a ponderosa top and trained the glasses, to my horror, on an American robin. Here was a bird that had surrounded me all my life, and it took this remote forest to make me listen.

December 3, 1978

I stopped at the Bosque del Apache Wildlife Refuge south of Albuquerque. Hundreds of sandhill cranes, grey and lean, stood in open fields near the Rio Grande. Their mass emitted a loud hollow rumbling, and waves of movement seemed continually to pass through them, causing a few at a time to stretch their wings and hop a foot or two, as if ruffled by a common internal breeze. One whooping crane stood among them, taller and pure white, a prima ballerina. Later I followed a trail through the high grass, one of the few places one is allowed on foot. A flock of sandhill cranes flew overhead in streamlined, arrowlike shapes, and suddenly the grass around crepitated as if with a soft rain or a hail of pellets. It was a moment before I realized that what I was hearing, and fortunately not feeling, was a shower of crane droppings.

December 27, 1978

I spent the day exploring the Provincial Museum in Victoria, B.C., and came upon cases of stuffed birds representing half the species in North America. Here was a chance to bone up on details of marking even better than I could with the best photos and drawings. After fifteen minutes I became depressed—not because my brain grew stale or the specimens were dead, but because the birds looked so much smaller than they do in life. Does the process of taxidermy actually shrink them, or does the animation of life make them look larger than they really are?

July 15, 1979

I lost the jay page of *Birds of North America* when a neighbor's Siamese was stalking the warbler I was trying to look up and I literally threw the book at him.

September 8, 1979

A chickadee in the side yard tried to light on a salsify in full seed, burst the seeds apart like a child kicking a dandelion, and squawked off in great surprise. It's comforting to know that even so perfect a machine as a chickadee can make dumb mistakes.

November 7, 1979

Walking out the drive to get the morning paper at my mother's house outside Phoenix, I noticed the top hole in a saguaro cactus was plugged with an ill-defined mass of grey like a rat's nest. When I approached the grey withdrew, leaving the hole black. Somewhere inside was grey matter, alive.

November 8, 1979

I snuck out early with binoculars, hid behind a palo verde, and the rat's nest resolved into a small face with its eyes closed as if sunning itself: an owl. My guide books were unhelpful, but a volume at the library stated that only two species of owl roost in the saguaro, and since the elf owl was too small, the face belonged to a screech owl. Surrounded by green pulp, it reminded me oddly of an almond stuffed in an olive.

February 2, 1980

Just north of Fort Huachuca on a morning blank with fog, I pulled off to peer through a rift to a ridge dazzling with sable rocks and snow. In the foreground stood a mesquite filled with red-winged blackbirds making a racket like gurgling windchimes, with one silent hawk on top. It was like a Christmas tree with blackbirds for ornaments and a hawk for a star. Given a massive choice of trees, why were both species on the same one? I later asked two experienced birders, one of whom replied that blackbirds and hawks are not necessarily enemies, and the other that perhaps the blackbirds were keeping an eye on the hawk. One wonders about experts. . . .

March 23, 1980

On the interstate halfway from Tucson in Phoenix I saw a cottonwood giving off a continuous smoke, like the bush that burns and is not consumed. Pulling off and looking through the binoculars I saw that the bits of smoke were yellow-headed blackbirds, a species I had never seen before in such profusion. On the tree their black undersides merged with the foliage, but as they resettled on the ground their yellow heads tossed like a field of poppies. Thirty-six-wheelers screamed within feet of me, nearly pulling me into their wake, but in the gaps between traffic I could hear the blackbirds chuckling across the field.

April 17, 1980

Who could be flying a kite, and at such an altitude, where only a jeep track wound through miles of volcanic tuff? I grabbed the glasses, and the long-tailed shape soaring upward resolved into a hawk with a lengthy snake in its talons. I had to laugh at the implicit pun, for a kite is one of the groups of the hawk family. This was God's kite. . . .

May 24, 1980

Seldom has the sheer poignancy of a bird so struck me: the red plush on the cap and throat, the custard underfeathers, the intricately peppered wings, back and tail. I had marveled at the same species once in my yard; now here it was in a sandstone canyon quietly tapping holes in a tree, waiting for the sap to ooze out, feeding on the trapped insects. Sympathy with other creatures comes unbidden, and I felt a sudden connection with this obscure life, so physically vibrant, so committed to its odd destiny from tree to tree. I also knew my trance was beginning to pall on a companion unused to long stares at mute phenomena. Perhaps the very sense of my friend's discomfort—not wanting to disturb me but bored beyond endurance—further honed my perception. But I knew my time with this creature was limited, and how it would end. "What kind of bird is it?" whispered my friend.

I considered lying. "A yellow-bellied sapsucker."

"You have to be kidding. There actually *is* a yellow-bellied sapsucker?"

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I clung to the bird. "You're looking at it."

"Be serious. Jack Benny made that up."

"No," I said, watching the creature turn to mirage even as it quietly tapped the bark. "It's a real bird." I fixed on the deep red feathers, the even rows of holes, the progress from tree to tree. Sweet life without words.

"A yellow-bellied sapsucker," repeated my friend as if filing an anecdote. "Ten minutes in front of a yellow-bellied sapsucker."

May 26, 1980

I stood behind a juniper and watched a rock wren bobbing on a ledge. It was joined by another, then a third, and suddenly the trio was trilling and bobbing in unison like The Supremes.

June 16, 1980

A friend phoned me that sapsuckers were nesting in an eye-level hole in one of his dead aspens, in case I wanted to come over. We watched from a distance as the mother flew out of an opening that seemed half her diameter, glided back a few minutes later to muffled shrieks, squeezed inside to feed her brood, then flew off again. After one of her exits we crept to the hole. There was no peering into the darkness, but we took turns listening. The birds apparently thought it was a food-bearing mother rather than a human ear that darkened their world, and let loose with a screeching only inches from the tympanum that left my right ear ringing as if it had just been through a disco.

October 2, 1980

A magazine usually devoted to heroic backpacks, desperate river runs and ascents of north faces ran an orange and scarlet telefoto cover of some geese crossing the sun. A feature article on birdwatching: perhaps contemplation had come of age. The story, it turned out, concerned a young man who had tried to break the record for the number of species sighted in North America during one calendar year, and spent increasing sums jetting to ever more remote locales as time ran out. No suspicious lingering to admire feathers, none of the wonder of birds at all beyond the cover photo—the feature proved that birdwatching could engage one's manhood as thoroughly as kayaking Lava Falls or getting frostbite on Denali. The credit card birder may have had facets not covered by the article, but the author was clearly one of the kids from football scrimmage.

September 23, 1981

Below windshield level was a flash of grey that refused to deflect, and that reappeared as a limp pile in the rearview mirror. Alone on a gravel road in eastern Oregon, I backed up to see what I'd hit. The bird was unbelievably soft, the skull a tough little acorn on a loose, boneless neck. There was a clean, art deco quality to the charcoal grey back, the grey head with black mask, the black wings that pulled out to reveal pure white medallions, the fierce hooked beak. It was a loggerhead shrike. I remembered an old movie called "The Shrike," based on the myth that the female kills the male after mating, and starring a menacing saccharine June Allyson. But the bird in my hand seemed genderless, I was the hapless killer, and the shrike seemed an unmythical creature making its way in earnest.

October 6, 1981

Recently I watched a cowbird going berserk along a mirrored window, raising one wing and then the other, feinting, jabbing the glass, hovering a foot away to gather force for the next attack, driving off the rival cowbird that was himself. And this afternoon I traced an odd scratching to a sill where a fly batted itself against the bottom of a clear window and a female Wilson's warbler hopped outside in tandem, trying to stab the fly through the glass. Birds that hurl themselves against windows they take for continuing blue sky and are killed, or momentarily stunned, have little time to ponder the deception. But what of the cowbird and the warbler? We assume that birds live wholly in the present and fly off with their instinct intact, neither suffering psychoses nor reporting religious experiences. But for us their minds are necessarily off-limits, and to imagine shifts in their worldview only throws us back on ourselves with our mirages, our tricks like glass that pit the senses against each other, saying yes to the eyes and no to the beak, and causing the insect wings to beat against the impenetrable light until they expire.

March 27, 1982

Last night I dreamed I was in a woods writing about owls when a small owl lit on a branch not far overhead. There's a coincidence, I thought, and left off writing to stare at my material. The owl announced he had come to help me with the way owls think. But before he told me, for his amusement he wanted to hear my own repertoire of vocal sounds. I tried a few fake hoots, ran through the vowels including a long screeched-out *eeee*, and ended with the raucous *ca-ca* that sometimes gets a laugh out of human beings, though not this owl.

I asked whether it wasn't exhilarating to swoop through the air and plunge upon things. The owl replied that hawks and eagles, being more physical, did relish those sensations. While owls also got their food that way, their pleasures were rather more inward.

As I was about to ask him to be more specific, the owl flew off, leaving me to feel I hadn't met a representative owl so much as an individual, even an eccentric within the owl kingdom.

November 28, 1982

It strikes me that in humanity I appreciate a quiet, withdrawn, noncombative quality once praised as gentleness and now put down as wimpiness, while in birds I am drawn to raptors, predators and scavengers—the crows and hawks, falcons and shrikes—birds that swoop upon other birds or the recent dead. Is some suppressed viciousness surfacing in birdwatching? Is it vicarious liberation from moral choice? Whatever the motive, what revenge to discover the magpie jay, a bird with the brattiest qualities of both its namesakes and a rakish crest all its own. In gangs they terrorize the Oaxacan roadsides, flitting arrogantly from tree to tree, bouncing the branches, their eyes running with mascara, screeching, brawling, refusing to follow the lead's command. What splendid arrogance! What relief they're not people.

December 2, 1982

A love of birds resembles, visually, a love for flowers, as well as a taste for creations in precious metals and gems. A case in point is the russet-crowned motmot, a foot-long bird we spotted by the Chiapan roadside, in silhouette as if poised for display. The eye is a dark ruby with a black center, set in a streak of lapis and

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shadowed by malachite; the beak is hooked onyx; the crown is of amber; and the slender body, with undersides of pale citron, tapers to twin black tail feathers whose webbing is plucked near the tips so that the points hang like pendants. Peterson's *Field Guide to Mexican Birds* shows the russet-crowned motmot as the drabbest bird on the page, but the sight of it in person makes even Yeats' bird of "beaten gold and gold enameling" seem a comparative sparrow.

May 9, 1983

Over the years I have identified such false birds as dead leaves, mesquite beans, pine cones, insulators and chipmunks. And this morning on the San Juan River I saw the flash of a snowy egret that turned out to be a kayak paddle.

November 4, 1983

How strange that a hummingbird should return to the nest outside the window in November, months ahead of schedule. And such an odd hummingbird—instead of sitting beady-eyed midair in a variety of poses before lighting, it sped to and fro like a relay runner. I picked up the glasses from across the room: the bird was a black-tailed gnatcatcher recycling the hummingbird nest for its own new home.

February 29, 1984

I celebrated Leap Year Day by walking out on the Death Valley saltpan. Though the sun bore down and kiln-glazed escarpments towered above me, the valley floor of salt, soft underfoot and glistening for miles, inevitably reminded me of snow. When I raised my binoculars to decipher a black speck in the distance, I involuntarily pictured a brown-capped rosy finch—a bird I looked for in tundra snowfields last July. Another quarter of a mile brought me to the speck itself, indeed a bird.

Alone with its blue shadow, it was a dead crow. Its feet were folded into its belly; otherwise it was intact. What feathers I could see were in disarray, stripped of their iridescence and bleached to an ash, but most of the bird was crusted with glittering crystals of salt. The eye sockets shone with a pure white concentration, as if to meet the sun's own stare, and only the bill protruded with its impermeable horn. Saline moisture had apparently filtered upward from the saltpan by capillary action, which draws water solutions through anything porous. Heat and drought had burned off the water, leaving salt to crystallize on the feathers like hoarfrost. I was reminded of the elaborate crystal salt dishes used at Versailles, here imitated by an actual bird that fell by chance, to begin its lone transmigration into the mineral kingdom.

Most journals betray a greater leaning toward prejudice and romance than scientific rigor, and some of them slight the bird for the birdwatcher. As a latecomer to birding and nonmember of the Audubon Society I have doubtless missed the full range of birdwatchers, but suspect their diversity approximates that of birds. And I have identified the dreary little squabblers. These are the rabid taxonomists, the detail jocks who know—as if birds were cars—all the eye rings, the wing bars, the curvature of beaks, the lengths of tail. Off they go, pad in hand, after the new find. But their thrill is not rarity as such but the addition of one more sighting. Scaled-down versions of the sprinter in the magazine article, they are vying to see how many species they can spot in a given gulch, or on a single Memorial Day, and the birder with the highest body count wins. At their most ludicrous they keep what is known as a "life list," a count of the species they have identified between birth and death. I look forward to the first tomb inscribed, "He Saw 1,067 Species of Birds." As technicians they are virtuosos. They can distinguish between the multitudes of sparrows they resemble and which impressively swell their count, and by scoring the species everyone else misses they make one realize how blind (or else how honest) the rest of us are. The wonder of birds must have struck them when they began, or they'd have found something else to quantify, but somewhere along the line—through boredom, lack of imagination, or the ritual of groups—they lost the way. And it is they who have corrupted the joy, for the number-buffs have introduced what birdwatching as romance so gloriously lacks: competition. Their champion's favorite bird is his boring self.

At the opposite pole is the professional ornithologist. The bird lister's goal, identification, is his starting point. Using mist nets, banding, photography, computers, volumes of

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data and a lifetime of patience, his mission is to understand the bird. He must determine its food, its territory, its life cycle, the fluctuations of the species, its niche in the biosphere—even, perhaps, its well-being, as an indicator of an area's environmental health. But the ornithologist too runs his risk. If he is to know birds thoroughly, birdwatching for him cannot be a mere diversion among many, and given the range even of birds he will have to specialize. It will finally be plovers or pigeons, hawks or hummingbirds. And no matter what bird he chooses, and how much he finds out, the bird will escape in the end.

Where does that leave the oaf who simply likes to look at birds? Teased by a spectacle, perhaps, that tends toward pattern. I find I enjoy knowing a bird by its shape, its call, its flight pattern, its preferred roost, its bobs and struts, the tics and quirks that give it a composite personality. Like the ornithologist I am interested—but only mildly—in where it goes, what it eats, how it nests, what it flees from, how it dies and gets reborn. Like the quantity buff I am delighted to add a new species, but if I knew how many I could recognize, the number wouldn't compare with anything. What I value most is the image that survives the bird's absence.

I love, for instance, to wake by an open window outside Phoenix and hear the desert, throat by throat, come alive. The quail, which have been restless all night, venture a few tentative clucks, and I can see them like fat grenades kicking among the oleanders. The curve-billed thrasher gives one lewd upward whistle, then lets loose with nonstop gibberish like a crazed auctioneer. Daylight is launched. Cackling, warbling, chattering, cooing and screeching, cries thicken, overlap, diminish and return, and as I lie with my eyes half closed I can single them out. The sad phrase of the dove brings back childhood summers in Wisconsin. The reedy screams of the flickers evoke their arrogant stance on a saguaro, or their flight in swoops and peaks like phone wires seen from a train. Still cruder is the rattle of the cactus wren, whose love call is more like the fart of a tin soldier. The chitter of house finches reminds me of my mail-order bird caller, my shame-faced childhood slinking through suburban back yards. The breathless jabber of the mockingbird distinguishes itself from the thrasher by repeating each riff two or three times, and the vision of its deadly swoop with a flash of wing bars brings back that splendid description in *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* in which Annie Dillard concludes that "beauty and grace are performed whether or not we will or sense them. The least we can do is to be there." This is the most elegant of birdwatching, to lie with eyes closed and let the images and associations drift in and out of mind to the music of chance. I understand now why I like to birdwatch. It is to populate the world, or my version of the world, with friends.

Like any passionate concern, birdwatching reaches toward life in the main, but on its own terms. One sees a stiff-legged little brown oval bouncing up the granite, spots it for a rock wren and says, "I know you," because one has seen other rock wrens just like it. One grows attached to a particular hummingbird nesting just outside the window, wishing the best for its brood, assuming it is always the same mama who returns—but female hummingbirds look so nearly alike that only a trained eye can distinguish between species, let alone individuals. Joseph Campbell has written that for the primitive mind each species is a kind of multiplied individual, related to a mythic Master Animal, and while our relationship has been demystified, the psychology probably still holds. Our domesticated higher mammals seem to be individuals like ourselves, and we project personalities onto birds in cages, but the more a creature retreats into the wild, the more it melts for us into a composite personality—which is its myth for us. One of the ironies of birdwatching is that, for all its apparent sentiment, it is rigorously impersonal.

The only individual involved, in fact, is the observer, who may ultimately find himself the most curious observation. I note that the little boy who took down his feeder for lack of novelty and an annoyance with blue jays, has become the adult whose binoculars weigh on his neck if he doesn't see some action. Birdwatching is a test of patience, and I have found how far mine is from that of an ornithologist, let alone a saint. But it is encouraging to note that if a cottonwood is stilled in a rare lapse of wind, one's eyes go straight to the verdin quivering like one restless leaf; or that staring at a tangle of willows I can spot the brown towhee hopping among the stems. Lack of patience is compensated by the fact that our vision has evolved to pick up the faintest stir, the least exception to immobility, and we are inevitably drawn to what action there is. By strange indirection birds are mirrors in which we catch, in passing, our own eyes.

The world of birds, like music, baseball or gin, can sift its way through a personality. Just as most people have sex lives, so do a few have bird lives. Briefly sighted, flashing out of sight, birds are bits of a puzzle we put together a little faster than it unravels. Spontaneous within limits we can recognize, birds help our eyes master the unknown. Wherever this rootless century sends us, we can begin to reorient ourselves through the common language that shares our air: like weather and sky, birds are a frame of reference. A more progressive referent might be rock bands, fast food or TV. But for some of us who are turning down the volume, it is, mercifully, still birdsong. □

COMING IN THE NAR:

A Summer Fiction Issue
including the first Under-Four-Minute Short Story Field
since the Olympics
&
A Fantasic Solution
to the Abortion Dilemma
&
The Usual Wisdoms in Poetry and Prose

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Brief Poetry Notices

Ordinances, by Naomi Lazard. Owl Creek. $5.00

☆ ☆ ☆

An eccentric and fascinating voice from Orwell's year-which-is-at-last-upon-us informs these terrifying satires, injunctions suggesting how far the private life has been encroached upon by the collective.

The House Party, by Caroline Knox. Georgia. $10.95; $6.95 paper.

☆ ☆ ☆

Zany stuff, with enough linguistic and metrical skill to transform gratuities into credible razzmatazz.

Notes from a Child of Paradise, by Alfred Corn. Viking Penguin. $14.95; $8.95 paper.

☆ ☆ ☆

This formal, historical, confessional narrative poem chronicles the birth and death of a love relationship emblematic of the culture of the '60s and '70s. With no motivation for the speaker's actions, the artful command of language which is Corn's drawing card too often turns the poem into a garrulous parleyer of cultural artifact.

The Sorrows of Architecture, by Liam Rector. Dragon Gate. $14.00; $6.00 paper.

☆ ☆ ☆

Formal or free, these personal lyrics attempt to speak for the problems of the last two decades. Though the range is considerably smaller here, the book has far more humor and humanity than Corn's, albeit less polish.

The Faces of Americans in 1853, by Wesley McNair. Missouri. $6.95 paper.

☆ ☆

A sort of New England version of Sherwood Anderson appears in poems too monosyllabic and rhythmically flaccid to go out with more than a whimper. (Winner of the 1984 Devins Award as chosen by David Wagoner.)

The White Wave, by Kate Daniels. Pittsburgh. $12.95; $6.95 paper.

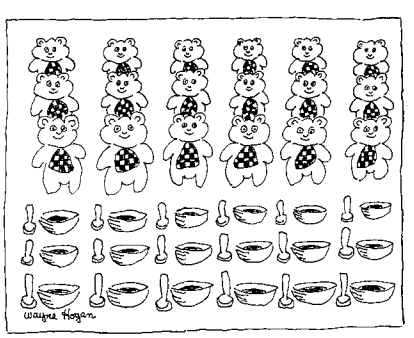
☆ ☆ ☆

Warm, unassuming poems which lead us to a real affection for their unpretentious speaker as she draws near family and friends, her conclusions less valuable than her accounts of experience. (Winner of the Agnes Lynch Starret Poetry Prize.)

The Madonna Who Shifts For Herself, by Lyn Lifshin. Applezaba Press. $3.95.

☆

One of our most prolific poets, Lifshin proves herself again Queen of the quickie in these sex poems which are as speedy a read as you'll find in anything less than a video game.



The White House, by Robert Gibb. Missouri. $6.95.

☆ ☆ ☆

If Gibb's technique superficially resembles McNair's, these poems redeem themselves by their insistent but subtle musicality and a speaker who tenderly recounts his limited experience.

The Evolution of the Flightless Bird, by Richard Kenny. Yale. $12.95; $5.85 paper.

☆ ☆ ☆

If these poems sound like those of the judge, that does not diminish their considerable learning, range and tactile excitement. Further, they are more athletic, less fussy, than Merrill's. (The 1983 Yale Series of Younger Poets winner, selected by James Merrill.)

Black Dog, Red Dog, by Stephen Dobyns. Holt Rinehart and Winston. $7.95.

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Inexorable sentence logic guides these violent, melancholy poems into empathy for a gallery of dispossessed citizens, each of whom partakes of the speaker's human frailty. (Selected for the National Poetry Series by Robert Hass.)

The Weird Kid, by Mark Vinz. New Rivers. $3.50.

☆

The prose poem at its dullest. Few of the potentials of poetry are in this emotional reportage, which takes down the day-to-day and gives it back: the day-to-day.

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Not Dancing, by Stephen Dunn. Carnegie-Mellon. $10.95; $5.95 paper.

☆ ☆ ☆

Dunn may be the current master of the eternal-in-the-diurnal, as clever a necromancer of the ordinary as our sad decade can come up with.

Hours, by Frances Mayes. Lost Roads. $5.95.

☆ ☆

Of more interest for its essay on being a woman poet today than for the poems whose use of detail is unselective and prosaic.

Summer Celestial, by Stanley Plumly. Ecco. $13.50.

☆ ☆ ½

Plumly breaks no new ground here, though he does well by his perennials: nature and family, cityscapes, and the landscape of nostalgia.

Slow Transparency, by Rachel Hadas. Wesleyan. $16.00; $7.95 paper.

☆ ☆

Poems of forced imagination, deliberate and intelligent in all the wrong places—and from Vermont to Greece.

Reckless Wedding, by Maria Flook. Houghton-Mifflin. $12.95; $5.95 paper.

☆ ☆ ½

Poems restless and confident in their metaphors and manners, though often without surprises in emotional resolutions.

A Wave, by John Ashbery. Viking. $14.95.

☆ ☆ ½

The poet won't make any new friends and will have trouble keeping some of his old in this book which bristles with present-consciousness abstractions.

LETTERS

Freud and "Social Mischief"

TO THE EDITOR:

Thomas H. Thompson's spirited article in your December 1984 number, "Freud Redux: Psychoanalysis Turned Inside Out," mentions Adolf Grünbaum and me as recent "outsider critics" who merit a hearing. Though I am grateful for the attention, and though I find Thompson's critique of Jeffrey Masson's *The Assault on Truth* to be quite acute, in most other respects your author appears to be drastically confused. Thompson's thesis is that psychoanalysis is undergoing a regeneration now that its scientific pretensions have been both unmasked and demonstrated to be inessential to its true nature. But not only does he offer no evidence for the alleged regeneration, he also indulges in some extremely slippery reasoning about the supposed irrelevance of scientific criteria to a just assessment of psychoanalysis.

Thompson's confusions apparently originate in his adherence to a "hermeneutic" construal of certain Freudian propositions. Hence his uncritical praise for Paul Ricoeur, Roy Schafer, and George Klein. The only missing member of the Freudian-hermeneutic pantheon is Jürgen Habermas, but Habermas happens to be the explicit guiding presence behind a previous article of Thompson's that appeared in your pages, "Sigmund Freud: The Once and Future Hero" (Spring 1980). There Thompson showed himself to be an enthusiast of Habermas's neo-Marxist attempt, in *Knowledge and Human Interests*, to rescue psychoanalysis from Freud's own "scientistic self-misunderstanding."

By now Thompson has surely had a chance to read Adolf Grünbaum's *The Foundations of Psychoanalysis: A Philosophical Critique*, which the University of California Press published last fall. (An essay of mine discussing the book can be found in *The New Republic* of January 21, 1985.) In his long and densely argued Introduction, Grünbaum expressly refutes the major epistemological claims of Habermas, Ricoeur, Klein, and Schafer. Grünbaum shows that Habermas and Ricoeur in particular have drawn specious distinctions between scientific and nonscientific assertions—distinctions that appear to lie behind Thompson's own attempt to cordon off a number of psychoanalytic claims from rational scrutiny. And Grünbaum further shows that these thinkers have obfuscated Freudian causal claims by trying to demote them provisionally to mere "meanings" or "interpretations" that can be hermeneutically appreciated without needless worry about their possible falsity. As Grünbaum points out, Habermas and Ricoeur hold causality in abeyance just long enough to exempt their favorite doctrines from criticism—after which they go on to treat those same doctrines as both causal and empirically correct. In a word, they are playing an intellectual shell game.

I am sorry to say that Thompson's own argument is not even coherent enough to merit this harsh characterization. Nevertheless, I will do my best to make sense of it. Psychoanalysis, Thompson says, would have to be judged as "rather poor science" if we felt obliged to measure it against the real thing, such as physics and chemistry. Its claims about the sources of neurosis are arbitrary and dubious, its therapy is largely a flop, and its several overlapping models of the mind are embarrassingly creaky and fanciful. But now for the good news. First, Freud made many claims that are not scientific at all; hence, any attack on psychoanalysis that restricts itself to scientific inadequacies will leave much of the doctrine untouched. And second, the essence of psychoanalysis resides not in its propositional claims but in the "story" that develops between the analyst and analysand. That story, says Thompson, is neither true nor false; it is just a useful myth which eventually leads, in the ideal outcome, to "a life bereft of 'story'"—in other words, a life completely lacking in egoistic illusions.

Though it lies beyond my powers of exposition to say how the two parts of Thompson's case fit together, I can at least consider them one by one. First, then, let us contemplate the claim that Freud, notwithstanding his repeated insistence that psychoanalysis is a natural science like any

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other, in fact bequeathed us a largely nonscientific body of insights. Thompson's grounds for this idea consist partly (I think) in the observation that psychoanalysis is still extant after having been thoroughly discredited as a science; he feels, and I agree, that this survival points to sources of appeal that are remote from the narrowly rational. But since the same asset can be ascribed to palm reading and psychic surgery among other "nonsciences," this does not look like an especially promising line of defense.

Well, says Thompson, what about Freud's many changes of perspective? Do they not indicate a "philosophical" restlessness that propels him outside the orbit of the scientific?

> Over a period of almost forty-five years and an oeuvre of twenty-four volumes, Freud developed a set of theories which is not a unified system in any sense that resembles "system" in the natural sciences. He develops and (partly) discards a number of less broad and generic paradigmatic concepts mated with some less ephemeral and basic paradigms—but—from the beginning to the end the style, flavor, and very mode of procedure show vast differences. One tendency, to illustrate my point, is the distancing of Freudian theory over time from the evidence of the consulting room. More and more, Freud, in pursuit of the philosophical knowledge that he had earlier in his career defended against, finds himself writing on broad speculative themes that are far more readily describable as "philosophical" than "scientific."

Here we can detect two logical pratfalls on Thompson's part. The first is his inference that if Freud kept changing his "paradigmatic concepts," then surely he wasn't behaving like a scientist. That was precisely what Freud did have in common with scientific thinkers as opposed to mere charlatans or preachers. He deserves some credit for having repeatedly noticed that his detumescent trial balloons required patching. And second, Thompson thinks that if Freud's *Complete Psychological Works* contain some frank speculation, this too shows that we have erred in thinking of him as a would-be scientist. But by the same token we could say that Descartes and Newton and Pascal, all of whom took an interest in the supernatural, were "not really scientists," or that the social and political writings of Linus Pauling, Freeman Dyson, and B. F. Skinner exempt their scientific propositions from being evaluated as such.

More important than these non sequiturs, however, is Thompson's apparent assumption (more or less following Habermas) that the domain of science is restricted to laws generalized from observations of the physical properties of objects. Thus Thompson says that Freud followed "the natural science model" in his early research on the testicles of the eel, but that in works like *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and *Totem and Taboo* he produced "something far closer to a work of textual hermeneutics and linguistic analysis, not to mention . . . speculative metaphysics of the soul." Presumably, then, any critique of those works along scientific lines would be unfair.

Yet the works in question abound in manifestly scientific hypotheses—about mental energies and equilibriums, causes of anxiety, phylogenetically transmitted memories, and so forth. The hypotheses are scientific because, quite simply, they purport to be statements of regularity in nature. The fact that most of them border on the absurd scarcely raises them to a plane of "metaphysics" where it would be sacrilegious to mention their shortcomings. Nor are they the least bit "linguistic" or "hermeneutic" in character. Gnostic, perhaps, but not hermeneutic. They differ from more ordinary scientific hypotheses chiefly in the combination of insouciance and guile with which Freud puts them forward, by turns admitting their speculative standing and treating them as firmly established.

Thompson has tried to make a transcendent virtue out of Freud's most notorious weakness—his penchant for jumbling together mechanistic quasi-biological dogmas with prophetic utterances, imprudent borrowings from other sciences, and leftover bits of Romanticism. But Freud always remained a scientist; he was just a sloppy one. As Ernest Jones admitted in a passage that Thompson innocently quotes, Freud never bothered to test whether his favorite hunches were really laws. He just called them laws and that was that. And whenever he felt compelled to change his mind he proceeded with fresh arbitrariness and intolerance of dissent. The outcome was a multifarious body of thought that falls squarely within the domain of scientific claims but lacks a cogent rational basis. This is not the heartening picture that Thompson takes it to be.

As for "the distancing of Freudian theory over time from the evidence of the consulting room," it has become apparent in recent years that the consulting room never had more than a rhetorical relationship to Freud's actual means of arriving at his convictions. In Frank Sulloway's words, "Freud saw in his patients what psychoanalytic theory led him to look for and then to interpret the way he did; and when the theory changed, so did the clinical findings." Sulloway has further shown that the erroneous Lamarckian speculations that mortified Freudian readers of *Totem and Taboo* were crucial determinants of the central early doctrines of psychoanalysis. Thus Thompson's point about Freud's turn toward "philosophical knowledge" overlooks the deductive character of the entire Freudian system. Freud gradually relaxed his caution about revealing his biogenetic and specifically Fliessian premises, but from the very beginning they took priority over his supposed observations and cures of neurotic patients. Indeed, as I have shown elsewhere (*The New Criterion*, June 1984), Freud shamelessly lied about the nonexistent cures in order to prevent opponents from realizing that he had *no other* basis for his theories than cogitation about currently popular ideas.

The other half of Thompson's argument is taken from Janet Malcolm, who, awkwardly enough, happens to be a resolute opponent of hermeneutics. Be that as it may, Thompson finds her useful because she waxes lyrical about the analytic transaction, that collaborative story which somehow allows the patient to go forth and live without reliance on further stories. Malcolm's admission that the process hardly ever works does not discourage Thompson for a moment. He is interested not in endorsing the medical claims of Freudian therapists but in capturing something ineffable, nonpropositional, in their enterprise. And he thinks that Malcolm has put her finger on this something in saying that psychoanalysis deals neither with the patient's true infantile past nor with a lie but with a "myth" created through the analytic transference itself.

Since these distinctions are some-

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what dizzying, quotation may be more reliable than summary. Here then is Thompson on Malcolm:

> . . . [P]sychoanalytic truth is "the truth of what the present betrays about the past." Thus what psychoanalysis is about might be surprising to Freud. It is about the patient's story, his personal myth of the "past" as it is transmitted, reluctantly, through the resistance. To call it his "story" probably misleads. For Malcolm stresses that it is not the narrative nicety, the cleverness of the reconstructive activity that counts, but rather the patient's giving himself away by reënacting, in the transference, what produced his illness in the first place. To put it otherwise, the analysis analyzes not the actual past, but the interstices and integuments of the "resistance" and the nature of the transference (the "transference neurosis") which, on this account, cannot help but recapitulate and thus mimic the basis neurosis.

I cannot say for certain why Thompson thinks that this account insures psychoanalysis against the risk of scientifically based criticism, but I will offer two guesses. First, he seems to feel that he has located the heart of Freudianism in a process, "the patient's giving himself away," rather than in a theory. Processes, we can all agree, are neither true nor false; they just are. That has the right hermeneutic air of the inviolable about it. And second, Thompson evidently thinks that if the patient's story about his past is really an artifact of the analysis itself, then psychoanalysis once again stands outside the arena where vulgar questions of truth and falsity stand at risk.

All psychotherapies and, for that matter, all militant belief systems combine dogma with "process." The question is: so what? Just as we would hesitate to endorse the theology of a witch doctor on the grounds that he can put his subjects into a trance, so the propositional content of psychoanalysis remains unaffected by the cathartic intensity with which a patient may "give himself away." In this sense Thompson's emphasis on therapeutic experience is little more than a digression from the issues raised by empirically minded doubters. Moreover, Thompson appears to be confounding the mythic character of the patient's personal "story" with the theory of the psychoanalysis itself, which is unredeemably propositional. To a skeptic it is of little moment that therapists and patients play out their protracted relationship over a private myth; the issue is whether any of the assertions made by psychoanalysis as a system are worthy of belief.

Those assertions include the claims of therapeutic benefit that Thompson concedes to be exaggerated. Indeed, since Thompson plainly regards the current practice of psychoanalysis as a ritualistic exercise conducted by a thoroughly conservative and complacent institution, his retreat from theory into the immediacy of the doctor-patient dyad raises more questions than it answers. He cannot simultaneously convince us that psychoanalysis has turned its back on Freud's vision and that the perpetrators of this betrayal are the custodians of a special, precious kind of truth.

If I follow Thompson in his use of Malcolm, he is trying to say that the heart of psychoanalysis lies not in its chancy assertions about infantile sexuality and the repression etiology but in an unfolding act of self-disclosure that happens here and now in the therapeutic work. But look at the troupe of theoretical assumptions that get dragged into this here and now. First there is "the resistance," a concept that implies the general Freudian notion of the unconscious and its repressive energy. Then there is "the transference," whereby the patient's feelings toward the analyst are taken to be a replay of infantile feelings toward a parent, including the whole dubious scheme of repressed incest wishes and the like. And the transference is also said to reënact "what produced [the patient's] illness in the first place," which is to say that a vote of confidence is extended to the repression etiology after all.

Stripped of their gratuitous reference to the repressed past, a patient's "resistance" and "transference" look like entirely appropriate responses to the browbeating, emotional deprivation, and "aha!" allegorizing that characterize the strict Freudian approach to the therapeutic hour. But this is not of course what resistance and transference are officially thought to signify. The analyst's theory-laden invocation of these very concepts is typically his primary means of thwarting the patient's protest that his current problems are not being taken seriously. If the patient plays along with a proffered construction, however wild, he is "making progress," but if he disputes it he is accused of "resistance" or "negative transference." By accepting these tendentious and oversupple concepts in the orthodox, analyst-knows-best sense, Malcolm and Thompson are implicitly buying the whole institutional package of infantile determinism conjoined with interpretive condescension.

Malcolm at least realizes what she is doing. Indeed, her struggles with budding agnosticism toward psychoanalysis invariably end in an insistence on the full disagreeable Ur-Freudian catechism—penis envy, castration anxiety, female masochism and all. No pain, no gain, Malcolm believes; if an analysis doesn't arrive at demeaning and implausible accusations it just isn't the genuine article. A certain bracing fatalism, quite missing from Thompson's muddled and thrashing argument, imparts fascination to Malcolm's never-failing plunges toward her climactic *credo quia absurdum est.* And though she writes of the successfully terminated patient as someone who discards his "story," Malcolm is too keen an observer and narrator to avoid showing us that, on the contrary, the patient regularly *acquires* a story—the tiresome one we have heard at a thousand cocktail parties with the analyzed.

Toward the end of his article Thompson expresses wonder that some of us keep beating the dead horse of psychoanalysis, and he takes this as a sign that there's life in the old nag yet. Indeed there is. Freudian presuppositions still inhibit clear thought not just about mental illness but also about child development, criminality and the law, moral issues, and any number of cultural and historical phenomena that fall under the purview of methodologically infatuated humanists and social scientists. The question, I think, should not be why people like Grünbaum and Crews go on criticizing but why Thompson, who finds nothing to praise in Freud but his "iconoclasm" and his giddy self-image as a conquistador, nonetheless looks forward to a psychoanalytic renaissance. Perhaps he should reflect that ideas actually bear consequences in the world—and that the sway of crackpot ideas tends to entail not just false pretensions but social mischief as well.

Frederick Crews
Berkeley, California

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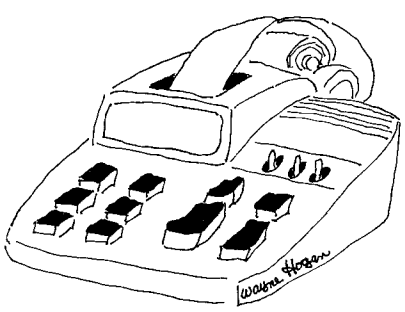
Poetry and the Art of Conversation

MARCEL CORNIS-POP

American Poetry Observed: Poets on Their Work, edited by Joe David Bellamy. Illinois. $11.95

Poetry, Michael Benedikt suggested in a 1977 interview, should be as successful and interesting as *speech*: "That's your communication problem as a person as well as a poet . . . My poetry *is* colloquial, but not in the sense of slangy: it's rather the language that I really use, today, right now." *American Poetry Observed: Poets on Their Work* in which this statement appears, is in many ways a rediscovery of this *art of conversation* within and around poetry. Twenty-six poets representing several generations, from Stanley Kunitz to Ai and James Tate, are invited, coaxed, trapped into talking about their poetry on the surmise that conversation (like teaching in literary workshops) can clarify ideas, bridge the gap between generations, and *domesticate* our notions of poetry, "make [us] more perceptive and humane about what [poets] are doing" (p. 235). In addition, the editor of this anthology of recent interviews (himself a poet and critic, conversant with the complexities of new poetry and fiction) hopes to bring back a "perishable genre," often "lost" in ephemeral or little-circulated magazines, while also reactivating an intertextual dialogue among the various interviews that would "provide a series of reference points, a record or a chronicle of some personalities, aesthetic issues, and ruling dogmas of the time" (Preface, p. x).

Other aims of this anthology are more manifestly polemical: this hybrid, versatile genre of the "interessay," even more popular in Europe, is often a disguised form of (self) criticism. Hence its particular significance in a culture whose poetry criticism seems to have "defaulted during the decade of the '60s," leaving "a critical vacuum . . . just at the time that saw the emergence of a new generation of poets of unprecedented number and largely unevaluated potential and accomplishment" (Preface, p. ix). In the absence of new "leprous and radioactive critics" (Tate, p. 258), the poets themselves have "strong urges to write criticism," but are often held back by "lingering inhibitions." At times they seem more comfortable with an oral, "talky" kind of criticism, savory yet penetrating (see Marvin Bell's references to Robert Bly, Mark Strand's to Merrill, W.S. Merwin and, in contrast, to William Stafford, Tate's comments on John Ashbery or Diane Wakoski's on the New York group). Equally instructive are many self-comments, especially when the interviewer does not simply elicit a reconfirmation of some half-remembered line, or a didactic "explication du texte." Less resourceful perhaps is their general critique of recent poetic theories and trends (with the exception of the controversy around contemporary surrealism, "feminist" or "confessional" poetry). Much of the intended revisionism lacks a more comprehensive theoretical basis. Few of the respondents are prepared to move beyond certain terminological clichés and traditions: Bly rejects critical tags such as "deep image" or "subjective image" in favor of an equally vague *image/picture* opposition; various kinds of line-length "mystique" are discarded for a "good ear" approach, based on an empirical sense of "the mimetic in sound" (p. 162), or on a "natural perception" of "an opportunity/to break the line/that gets insistent" (p. 234).



Significantly, at least one of the interviews (with Mark Strand) acknowledges the existence of a "new criticism," represented by a "strong" and "brilliant" critic such as Harold Bloom, but considers this direction uncomfortable (if not altogether dangerous) for the contemporary poet to depend upon. One can recognize here a common suspicion that the "boa-deconstructors" (in Geoffrey Hartman's witty phrase) are meant to become the new "establishment," just as influential and coercive as that of the New Critics. Yet their philosophy, or at least part of their terminology, is taking its revenge in such a description as Mark Strand's of how "the act of writing" gives a new direction to a poem, or in Ashbery's explanation of "writing" as a movement "in and out . . . of some other space"; in W.S. Merwin's definition of poetry as *tension*, "one element playing against another one, whether or not it's metrical"; in Denise Levertov's gloss on "openness" and "closure" in poetry; or in Diane Wakoski's (de)constructive theory of form according to which "one form liberates you from another," and "you have to make a ritual gesture of breaking the old forms in order to absolutely reestablish them." James Wright, furthermore, praised in a 1979 interview a novelist like Walker Percy for having become immersed (unlike most contemporary poets) in continental philosophy (Heidegger, Godamar, Derrida) and for having assimilated this perspective in an "intelligent" kind of writing, open to ethical and epistemological issues.

Many of the interviews in Joe David Bellamy's anthology, mostly unedited transcripts from tapes, retaining the "conversational tone" and "spontaneity" of the original dialogue, are too loose in form to allow any systematic discourse on

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critical ideas. Yet, when given a chance by their interviewers (at times more interested in biographical rather than poetical pursuits), poets struggle to clarify their position within or against the Whitman-Williams-Olson-Ginsberg line of approach, so significant in the early 'sixties. Many would now take a more critical view of (often their own) previous experimentation, doubting the "centrality" of such radical searches in the new context of the 1970s. This may come as a surprise to someone familiar with the ongoing foreign career of, say, Olson's "projective verse" in countries as distant as Romania and Yugoslavia, for example. Yet, the last two decades of American poetry, whether truly "an extraordinary period of reevaluation and change" (Michael Benedikt, p. 44) or, on the contrary, an interval of uncertainty and formalism, are certainly little concerned with *avant-garde experiment*. For James Tate this is a moment of reaction and retrenchment: "I feel a lot of poets are treading water, holding back, getting the drift of what's to come . . . Most poets take some kind of center-of-the-road voice that is popular . . ." (p. 254). Others read signs of "sophisticated fancy" and *mannerism* in recent poetry. It may appear that the contemporary poet, especially when he is a John Ashbery, "can plug into poetry whenever [he] want[s] to, and it will come out much the same way at any given time" (p. 19). The resultant poem will be, in this case, versatile, talky, ironical, crafty. In other cases simply fluent, transparent, "unencumbered" by considerations of craft to the point "where you hardly know that it's not everyday conversation" (Josephine Miles, p. 188). This *casualness* of diction and attitude (to which other poets like Donald Justice prefer a slower, more dramatistic kind of writing functioning as "a filter, organizer, register of experience," according to an Emily Dickinson esthetic instead of a Whitmanian one) is often matched with a "proper" philosophy, Arnoldian, Emersonian, Horatian, as the case may be, in search of those "harmonious reverberations you get out of life."

But even if the 1970s and 1980s have a different notion of "risk" (Benedikt, as an editor for the *Paris Review*, welcomes "poems that are coherently risky, that take risks that succeed" — p. 43), they still oppose a (cautious) idea of change and movement to placid fixity. This movement, so sensitive to growing age, may take certain poets past their period of experiment, away from verbal "hooplas" and deliberate incoherence and back within safer boundaries. Nevertheless, the emerging picture of the 1970s in poetry is more varied than anticipated: forms, styles, attitudes bounce off one another, whole areas of "traditional" poetry (a stronger rhyme and rhythm, a more comprehensive vocabulary, a greater range of materials— including those of "pop culture," for example), previously marginalized by the modernist practice, are brought back by poets of different generations. That prescriptive doctrine, starting with Pound's "Don'ts" and culminating with the reductionist diction of the postmodernists, has curiously narrowed poetry down to some "basic English" or "basic poetics." Fortunately for the contemporary American poet in "our new age of viable translation which only started ten to twenty years ago" (Tate, p. 257), his poem has come to inhabit a generous *palimpsest*, seen both as a "multilayered continuity" of traditions (in Merwin's description), and as supplementary intertextual space created through translations. Almost every poet featured in Bellamy's choice of interviews is also a significant translator, searching in medieval French ballads or in modern Spanish surrealism, in Japanese, Chinese, African, Romanian traditions or in contemporary European experiments, those *supplements* to American poetics, rhetoric and diction. "Translation is one way to let out some of those energies that might otherwise get bottled up and never find expression" (W. D. Snodgrass, p. 228). This theme of a necessary confrontation with a model, emphasized in many interviews, is given at one point an almost Lacanian-Bloomian significance, as a dramatic (ritualistic) struggle with an authoritative predecessor, a "father" (see Bly's requoted comment on the "ongoing quarrel . . . of contemporary American poets with their fathers"—p. 31).

From this viewpoint, the relation of recent American poetry with its immediate tradition (the postmodernist experiment of the 'sixties) becomes an intricate affair. Charles

STUART FRIEBERT

THERE. NOT THERE

I take the dog with me up into
the backwoods. The latch on the gate's
easy, the dog simply lifts it and we
pass through to where the river's served:
a sudden, extreme effort of water to
begin a story almost with its childhood.

Be that as it may, the dog takes a swim
and comes out again with an air of information
possessed. I walk on ahead, find a stick
to pitch, the dog on its heels, begging.
Playing with this stick means nothing,
you know, I say to the dog. Throw it,
he says, flashing a look, Just throw it,
you can do it. In the water dammit! To stand
in a field by an unknown river and feel
it odd to be commanded by a dog is almost
as bad as being worthless: With this stick,
I holler . . . When it strikes the water,
the light comes out like a star. Now go
fetch it yourself, the dog says, And be
quick about it, Max. In you go, there now.

They keep me quiet the next day, and the next.
Till I can go to the window by myself
    to see the dog
tied to its stake, mover of water, god of tides.

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Simic, for example, sees his generation (born in the 1930s) as "more or less undergoing a crisis. We have written that first poetry that came to us accidentally by virtue of having been born, having lived a certain kind of life, having such and such parents . . . And so in a way the material, the content of those poems, was presented to us by our sixteenth birthday, and we have been living off that like parasites. Now it's used up. Nothing left to say from that particular angle. Another set of experience has to be created and found. We have to make a really new beginning" (p. 217). The myth of a *new beginning* is expressed now in direct relation to the earlier experimental work of Bly, Olson or the New York school: "our generation inherited a style from the previous one . . ., we had it served on a platter." In response to this wish to make it new, Simic writes a type of "minimalist" poetry, transcending rhetoric and returning to "objectual" sources (that can also be the unconscious archetypal patterns with which the "American mind" operates); James Tate, on the other hand, experiments with forms of automatic writing and states of "electrified existentialism"; Donald Justice plays an intertextual chance game by shuffling verse cards (and substantially editing the results); Diane Wakoski confidently embraces a basic avant-garde principle ("to me art is living") and transfictionalizes it into disguised verse "novels"; Ashbery writes *The Vermont Notebook* on a bus, experimenting with a moving landscape and mind; while Bly pursues half metaphorical theories that would relocate poetry in the "image bank" of the "reptile brain."

A more sizable preoccupation (or a mere fad?) seems to be that with the *long narrative poem*. Turned down by a publisher in the early sixties, Benedikt's international anthology of *The Prose Poem* (1976) has in the meantime become an important part of the "new canon." A number of poets in Bellamy's book of interviews have been, at one time or another, tempted into "crossing the great water," even if with "cheater's versions" of the prose poem (like Marvin Bell's). While distrusting the prolixity of the epic, "hymnical" variants of the prose poem, or the "sliding quality of dream consciousness" that it sometimes harbors, such poets still appreciate the directness and relative freedom of this subgenre, comfortably anchored in its story-line. Few of them, however, approach the prose poem with a clear knowledge of its avant-garde roots in Rimbaud, Mallarmé or Max Jacob. At times the very boundaries between experiment and canon, poetry and prose, are collapsed, interchanged: "the more charged a piece of prose is, the more it tends toward the condition of poetry . . . The more charged poetry is, the more it's driven to the point where it does the same things that prose does . . ." (p. 176). But there is a significant agreement among poets as to some of the models for recent (and not necessarily narrative) poetry: Kafka, Orwell, Gertrude Stein, Pavese, Borges, Asturias, mystery narratives, the Japanese novel, etc. Such models may betoken another historical moment when *poetry strives to be as good as prose*. This task is by no means simple: postmodernist prose, undoubtedly the most interesting literary phenomenon at present, will have to force a more significant "retrenching, reexamination of poetics" than the one emerging from Bellamy's collection of interviews.

For the time being this narrative verve is mostly spent in autobiographical sketches or in a recapitulation of some recent events and legends of poetry: the Black Mountain poetry congregation in Berkeley (1965), a pilgrimage to Williams's Rutherford home, anecdotes surrounding that moment (set by Michael Benedikt in 1962-1963) when "American poetry became adventurous," etc. It might have been of interest to examine the reaction of a newer generation of poets (than that of Bell, Benedikt, Harper, Simic, Strand, Wakoski) to this narrative of recent American poetry, but the respective generation is represented here only by James Tate and Ai. A more radical kind of "retrenching" would result, for example, from Andrei Codrescu's *In America's Shoes* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1983). For this avant-garde poet and editor of Romanian origin, still nostalgic after the experimental 'sixties, the 1970s are by contrast an age of "neo-academics" and confusion, "the Years of the Troglodytes Returned." "What American poetry needs right now is a good war . . . I mean a poetic war." In the meantime, this neo-avant-gardist and co-editor of *Exquisite Corpse* will experiment with Californian "back-to-the-country" communities, subverted poetic forms and such novelistic memoirs as *In America's Shoes*, written with the narrative jouissance of a Henry Miller or Kerouac, but in the long run "domesticated" (along with a whole generation of "insomniacs") back into form and purpose.

There are a few comparable energies at work in Bellamy's anthology, though often kept in check: feminist poetry, Afro-American culture, political poetry, radical surrealism. They are described as an important contribution to (or revision of) the existing canon, but are rebutted in their more extreme manifestations. Superficial posturing, isolationism, segregation of any kind seems alien to poetry that, in Hartman's memorable definition, "is echo humanized, a responsive movement." (*Deconstruction and Criticism*, N.Y.: the Seabury Press, 1979, p. 195.)

This is perhaps another implied theme of Bellamy's anthology: "Whoever wants to speak in my poems is allowed to speak, regardless of sex, race, creed, or color . . . I'm simply a writer, I don't want to be catalogued, and my characters don't want to be catalogued . . . " (Ai, p. 5). Yet these voices are often contrasted, placed in a *dialogical context* that can only enrich their individual sense of identity. "In America the constancy of improvising one's text, personal and public, is the process of what Ellison called 'antagonistic cooperation,' counterpunching to statements on the values of things, and of human beings." (Michael S. Harper, p. 97). This contrapuntal dialogue can involve (as in the case of feminist or Afro-American poetry) a kind of "double consciousness" and parallel canons. Other areas (such as those of *regionalism*—see the interview with Richard Hugo) supplement the existing canon. Thus, even if many interlocutors in Bellamy's book, poets, professors of poetry, editors, critics, choose to meet on common grounds of belief and poetic practice, *American Poetry Observed* finally reveals to us significant contrapuntal relations (such as, to take one more example, the recurrent opposition between a conception of poetry as craft, taking place in language, and poetry as a feat of subjective consciousness). Such forces of polarization, constantly redefined, may finally articulate "the tremendous variety of contemporary poetry" into "a really new beginning." □

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Supranarrative Elegance

EUGENE K. GARBER

The Northwest Passage, by Norman Lavers. Fiction Collective. $6.95

The narrative that gives this novel its title recounts the doomed voyage of the British ship *Venture*, which set out in 1749 to discover the sea link joining the Pacific Northwest and the Colonies. The story is given to us principally in the hand of Davie Jenkins, the ship's naturalist, with occasional additions by George Harris, the ship's physician, and even more occasional entries from Captain Montague's factual log—papers which were discovered by an old sourdough in a cave in the Yukon and which eventually found their way to a county museum in the state of Washington. The papers are edited and transcribed—in 1975, let's say—by George Herbert, an unemployed history teacher. A sympathetic but essentially unprofessional editor, Herbert sees fit to add personal observations. Further, the papers and Herbert's commentary are being edited and glossed by a historian of a future world just now recovering from a nuclear catastrophe.

A second narrative involves Herbert and his wife, J. The couple, despite the uncertainties of the nuclear age, decide to have a child. This they accomplish, though not without misgivings and difficulty. J must give birth by caesarean section, experiences serious hemorrhaging, and finally has to have her uterus surgically removed. But the baby boy is sound, and presently Herbert gets a job.

These are the barest bones of the two plots. It is necessary to add that neither is suspenseful—deft foreshadowing clearly predicts death for the voyagers, birth for Herbert and J. We are therefore invited to shift our attention from event to significance—the significance residing in three supra-narrative structures: the scenic/textural, the rhetorical, and the philosophical.

Here is the kind of scene we get in the voyage narrative. It is from the hand of Jenkins.

> Dusky & Clanking antidiluvian *Monsters*, Gigantick black Lumps as if scarcely animated Mounds of the basaltic *Lava* in the very Process of becoming *Life*, lay Soaking in the Oaze & Mud at the Crater Bottom, & were just then haling themselves out, & starting theire many Paths outward no doubt to Forage. High rounded *Carapaces* of Black, sparsley o'ergrown with sooty Moss; scaled & peeling Elephantine Clubb Feet; long swinging Serpent Necks, toppt by tiny comickal *imbecile* old Mans Heads. These were the wonderful *Gallapago's* themselves, eponymic Masters of the Serpent *Kingdome* we had enterd, the Giant *Tortoises* we had read of so often in the works of the *Buccaners* of the last Century, who had made to these Isolated Shoares to Careen & New Stock theire *Shipps* in safety from the Eys of the *Mayne*.

Lavers' rendering of detail and his adoption of the point of view of the 18th century naturalist is masterful throughout. The texture of the 20th century writing is also at times lushly descriptive and evocative, yet always clean—plain style at its contemporary best. But it is in the striking if brief futuristic sections that Lavers matches the virtuoso triumphs of the 18th century papers. In the following passage the editor of the future celebrates androgyny and the polymorphous delights of sex in his/her world. (At this point he/she is commenting on a description by Jenkins of a communal society in the South Pacific.)

> "Woemmen" = MAN W/BABI-CARRING PARTS THEN/TIME MAN THINK THER BE 2 KINDS: "man" = MAN W/CUM/COCK "woman" = MAN W/BABI/HOLE BECUZ THEN/TIME MAN THINK THIS THER BE MUCH SILLI/SAD TRUBBEL FOR EGSAMP: "man" MORE BETTER THAN "woman" SO "man" CAN BE GUV CAN BE THINK/TEACH THINK/TECH ECT BUT NOT "woman" "woman" CAN PLAY W/ BABI CAN MAKE COOK CAN MAKE RED LIPS "man" NOT MOST SILLIEST: "man" CAN ONLI FUK "woman" NOT LIKE WE ALL MAKE HAPPI LUV/LUV

Elsewhere we learn from our androgynous antiquarian of the future that his/her world is starless, birdless, possesses compendious knowledge of the past and of science, is ruled by whites (all other races denominated "animals" and kept in compounds), permits no natural birth, creates no history, experiences no disease or suffering or war, and imposes on its population a "voluntari" death age of 42. Obviously there are dystopian clichés here, but one scarcely notices them, primarily because the curious combination of naiveté and insight is so plangent and poignant.

If texture and scene in *The Northwest Passage* are wonderully bright and variegated, the rhetorical structure of the novel is even more imaginatively invented. Recall that we have four principal narrators: David Jenkins, the naturalist who gives us the narrative of the voyage; George Herbert, the 1975 editor who comments on Jenkins's journals and also tells us something of his own life; the editor of the future, who comments on the writings of both Jenkins and Herbert while also revealing the conditions of his/her ambiguous world; and finally the third person omniscient narrator who overarches all of the others. And each of these has his own audience, his own narratees. Jenkins addresses the citizens of a future that evolution assures us will get progressively better. Herbert, of course, addresses readers of the voyage accounts; but in many ways his real narratee is himself, for he freely admits that his primary interest in the papers resides in their ability to illuminate his own life. The future editor's ostensible job is to make the Jenkins-cum-Herbert papers easily available and understandable to the historical/scientific community of which he is a member; but again, in many ways his real narratees are Jenkins and Herbert themselves, to whom he speaks in surprisingly empathetic retrospection. Finally, it is the third person omniscient narrator who creates the implied readers we must become in order to read this novel. And who are we, the implied readers? We are companions of the third person narrator's omniscience. We know all nature, all history. We understand the crooked heart of humankind. Yet we do not assume a Flaubertian aloofness. Our sympathies are broad and deep, if Olympian in distance. Masters of all space and time are we, perfect examples of Freud's desirable, invulnerable voy-

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MARK RUBIN

1973 CABERNET

If I could turn coffee into wine,
it would be red and shy
of being full. Instead
on the counter in front of me
a teaspoon leans in a cup of coffee:
warm night, cool blues on the jukebox,
a trombone slide to C.
I remember
a doll whose voice I controlled,
a Chatty Cathy, I think.
Despite how horizontal her body,
her eyes never closed. They were
like the startled eyes of quail
I brought down.

Who knows where they fly
when they resemble themselves, much less
friends, a fairytale from waking
in each other's perfect bodies.

In my wallet I have
a snapshot of someone who appears
to be looking for a kind word,
a pastel of private, passing thoughts.
As for the soul, perhaps.

At times I hear them,
and her and her. And therein lies
the beginning of responsibility.

eurs of scenes depicting mortal anguish.

I fear that I have made the rhetorical structure seem too complex, dangerously near contrivance. It is not. The weave and flow of the voices is entirely harmonious, gathering up into its final benevolence the strands of many fates.

The philosophical structure of the novel is predictably one of counterpoint. Jenkins is a pre-Darwinian optimist who believes that nature and society progress always toward perfection. Dr. Harris, a homosexual, is torn between his deep hatred of self and humanity on the one hand and his unsteady Rousseauistic faith in things primitive and uncorrupted on the other. Captain Montague is a white Christian chauvinist who believes that it is his mission to civilize and convert all of *orbis terrarum*. Herbert is a gentle existentialist who feeds animals, loves his wife and birds about equally, and strives to live in the eternal present despite the relentless encroachments of past and future. The religion of the androgynous editor of the future is one of control and stasis, for the mild pleasures of predictability and fixedness are much to be preferred to the discomforts and uncertainties of change and history. And which of these positions does the unfolding of the novel ratify? The senseless carnage of animals, the ravages of disease, the strange and arbitrary corruptions of society, the relentless curiosity of mankind which is sometimes loving and sometimes Faustian, the loveliness and the compulsiveness of sex, the power of love and fidelity, the madness of nuclear expansion, the joys of birthing—to what do they testify? For Lavers, it seems, they suggest that the world is a network of ironic juxtapositions, that the truth does not reside in one position vis-à-vis another but in the matrix, the mosaic of all suspended in an elegant tension.

For some readers the philosophical positions will perhaps seem intrinsically pat and too obvious in their dialectical arrangements—a matter which leads naturally to some summary remarks. Lavers is an ironist. His is not an art of ambiguity. The reader will not find here the massive and laminous ambiguities of a Melville or a Kafka. His thematic counters suffer no indefiniteness. They are precisely placed, and they are played within the constraints of a strictly determinant field of possibilities. In short, Lavers is a neoclassicist. The bite and precision of his irony is Swiftian, while his softer and larger sympathies owe something perhaps to Fielding.

Will you be surprised to learn that the novel is 137 pages long? If so, that will tell you something of the classical restraint and economy of this wonderfully imaginative and altogether human first novel. □

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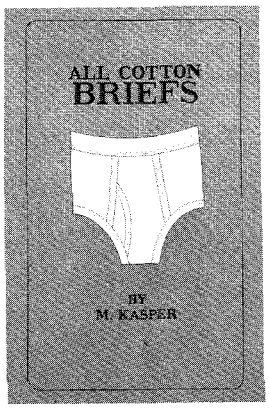

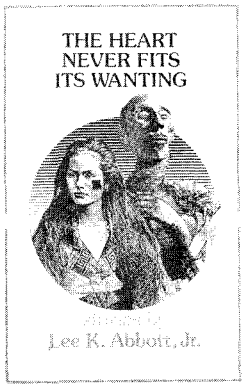

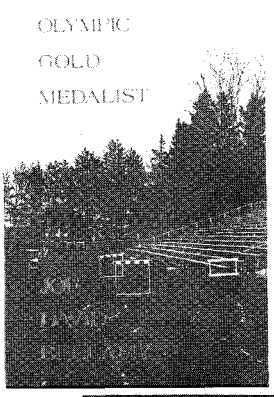

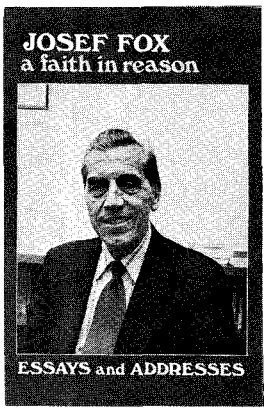

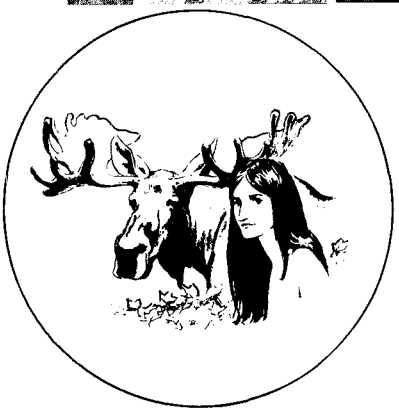

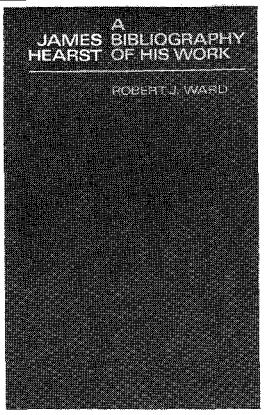

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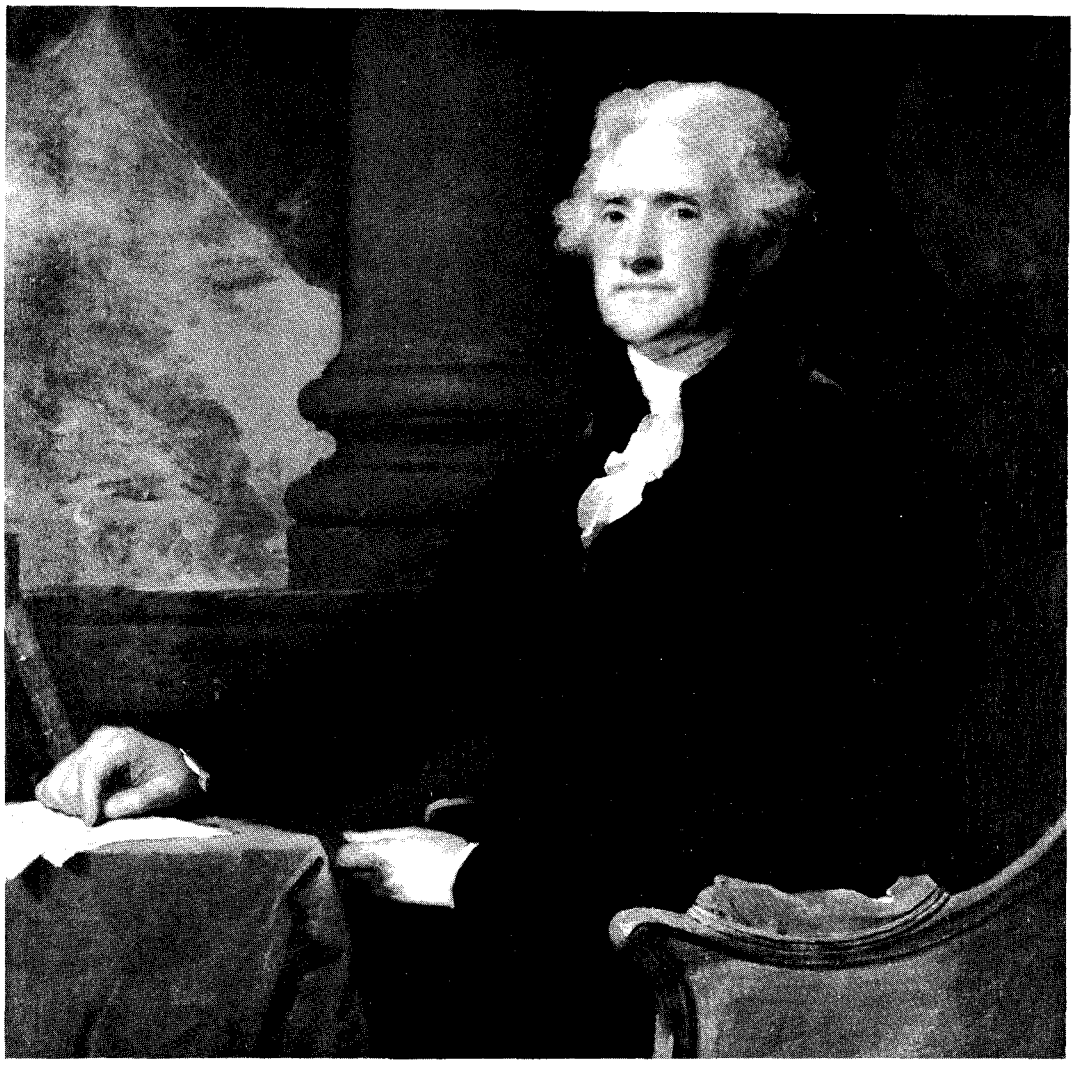

Sir Monticello Mar. 27. 25.

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